

Anime Fantastique

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THE PRINCE OF EGYPT

DREAMWORKS'
LEAP OF FAITH

PLUS: CULT HIT "CAPTAIN TYLOR"
THE ENIGMATIC MAMORU OSHII

THE MAGAZINE OF NEW WORLD ANIMATION
FROM THE PUBLISHERS OF CINEFANTASTIQUE



Volume 1 Number 1

MEET THE MASTERS OF S & M... ...SORCERY & MAGIC, THAT IS!



Carrot Glace -

He's young and over-sexed, but Carrot's dubious exterior hides a secret power so shocking that it can only be controlled by the combined efforts of two nubile young women.

Tira Misu -

Don't let her looks fool you. Any wolves that show up in this Little Red Riding Hood's bed are going to get the whipping of their lives!



Chocolate Misu -

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Marron Glace -

Handsome and highly intelligent, Marron was once the target of bullies as a child. Now a master of defensive magic, he's the one who's usually kicking butt!



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Is someone kidnapping your local virgins? Sucking the souls out of the peasants? Do you have a sorceress infestation that just won't go away? Don't worry! Just

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The creator of GHOST IN THE SHELL and BEAUTIFUL DREAMER never met an enigma he didn't embrace. **Harold David** talks to him about his career to date and his growing, international fame.

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FROM THE EDITOR

FULL SPEED, UH, AHEAD?



So this, then, must be the route to madness. There are nights, when the writers are meeting their deadlines and the art matches up with its text and the layouts are perfect, that I go to sleep knowing that my magazine is going to blow the socks off the world when it hits the stands. There are other nights, when blowing up the illos makes them look like they'd been hacked at by a hyperactive eight year old and we've got three pages of story for 20 pages of art and the writer's voice-mail announces that if we get to his backyard in the next five minutes we might be able to pull his notes from the pyre upon which his personal possessions are burning, that I lay awake thinking I've embarked upon a fool's mission, and why, oh, why did I believe the world was ready for a quarterly that would cover animation in all its aspects?

I'd been bugging Fred Clarke, publisher of *Cinefantastique* and *Femme Fatales*, off and on for years about the feasibility of an animation magazine, but purely out of interest as a writer (one more market, y'know). I never dreamed, when he came back to me with the idea for *AnimeFantastique*, that instead of being a happy laborer toiling in the fields (boy, talk about your divorce from reality!), I'd be the guy running the farm. It took me about ten minutes to accept the offer, it took *a lot* longer to understand the scope of the task.

That task started with the very idea of this magazine. It's one thing to say you're doing a magazine "about animation," it's another to realize that being "about animation" is nowhere near enough of a mandate. A magazine needs a point of view, a focus,

if it's going to be of any worth to the people seeking it out. Hit that focus, and the world is yours. Miss it, and, well, forget about issue two.

Here's what I came up with: I'm tired. I'm tired of magazines that start every animation article with, "Cartoons are no longer just about Mickey Mouse and Bugs Bunny..." I'm tired of magazines that treat animation as a fan-only item, rather than as a genuine art now staking greater claim to the mainstream. I'm tired of magazines that aren't willing to treat the people who create animation with the appreciation they deserve; live-action *grips* get more attention than do animators.

And so, *AnimeFantastique*. This is the kind of thing I've always wanted to see on the newsstands: behind-the-scenes articles with genuine meat on the bone; writers who don't hobble themselves with a just-us-fans mentality; journalism that's honest and interesting, with just a bit of edge. Serious coverage, all wrapped up in the kind of package readers have come to expect from *Cinefantastique*: glossy pages; high editorial-to-advertising ratio; *big art*; *big color*. Oh, and *no goddamn collector cels*.

There's more to discuss: not the least that little issue of applying the term anime to works created outside of Japan. Unfortunately, there's no room to discuss it here. It'll have to wait for future letters columns, and for my regular editorials when they return to their rightful place on the table of contents page. Meanwhile, enjoy the magazine, write in, and, if you're so inclined, pray I get some sleep tonight.

Dan Persons
AFQEditor@aol.com

AFQ



THE MOUSE IN THE MILLENIUM: DISNEY LAYS OUT ITS FUTURE

MIKE
LYONS

Think *HERCULES* put Disney on the critical list? Let's not pull the plug just yet. In the past fourteen years, since the Eisner-Katzenberg regime resuscitated every area of the company, Disney has taken animation — once considered the white elephant of the studio — and pushed it to the fore, making it once again the centerpiece of the Disney empire. In the process, other studios and other formats (television, independents) have been swept up in the wave.

So, instead of going in for the kill, this inaugural issue of *AnimeFantastique* seems like an opportune time take a look at where this leader of the industry plans to take us in the years ahead.

◆ In 1999, Disney will close out their "second golden age" and the millennium with their most prolific year ever, releasing three new animated projects. *TARZAN* will come first next summer. Directed by Chris Lima (who helmed *A GOOFY MOVIE*) and Chris Buck (a supervising animator, making his directing debut), *TARZAN* comes chock full of talent. The voice cast includes Minnie Driver as Jane; Nigel Hawthorne as her father, Porter; Glenn Close as Kala, Tarzan's adopted gorilla mother; Rosie O'Donnell as the gorilla Turk, the film's comic relief; and Tony Goldwyn (*GHOST*) as the title character.

Master animator Glen Keane, who took a sabbatical in 1995 after his work on the character Pocahontas, returns once again for this film, supervising Tarzan himself. In addition, *TARZAN* boasts songs by Phil Collins and promises a film that will delve deeper

than just the "me Tarzan, you Jane" films of Hollywood's past, examining the deeper issues of family and heritage.

◆ Thanksgiving of 1999 sees a rarity for the studio: an animated sequel, *TOY STORY 2*. Originally intended as direct-to-video, the sequel gained so much positive momentum during its production that it was promoted to theatrical status.

In *TOY STORY 2*, Woody (once again voiced by Tom Hanks) is stolen by an overzealous toy collector named Al (of "Al's Toy Barn," for those devotees of the original, voiced Wayne Knight) and the other toys, including Buzz Lightyear (Tim Allen, once again) must rescue Woody and return him to Andy.

◆ Capping off 1999 and the century for Disney is *FANTASIA 2000*. The film has been a closely guarded project of Walt's nephew, Roy E. Disney, who has worked and re-worked the film to ensure that it lives up not only to expectations, but also to

his uncle's wishes for the original film. Walt intended *FANTASIA* (1940) to be treated like a concert, returning to theaters every few years, with some older segments deleted and new "numbers" added.

Three vignettes remain from the original masterpiece: "The Nutcracker Suite," "Dance of the Hours," and, of course, "The Sorcerer's Apprentice." The new music includes Ottorino Respighi's "Pines of Rome" (a stunning whale ballet from *RESCUERS DOWN UNDER* director Hendel Butoy). The other segments will be Dmitri Shostakovich's "The Steadfast Tin Soldier," Igor Stravinsky's "The Firebird Suite," Camille Saint-Saens' "Carnival of the Animals" (directed by Eric Goldberg; a look at what happens when a flamingo gets hold of a yo-yo) and Edward Elgar's "Pomp and Circumstance March" (which will be used as a vehicle for Donald Duck).

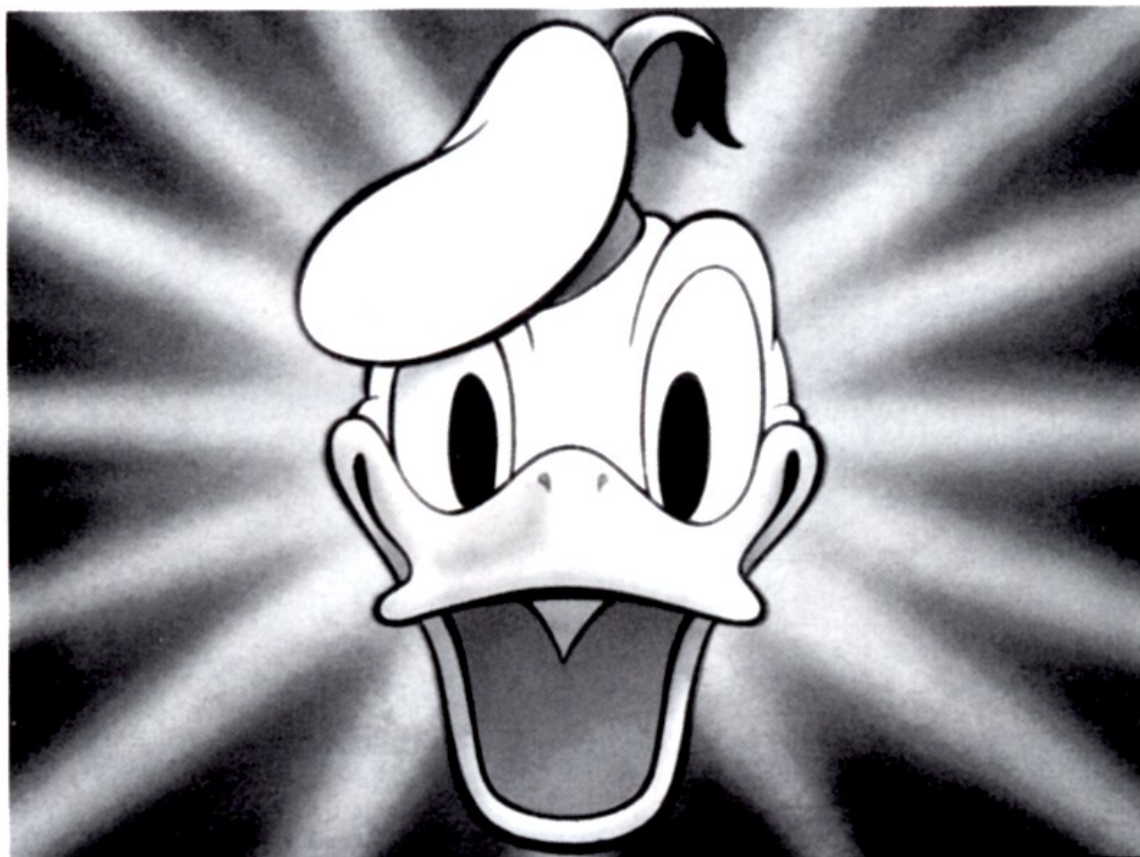
FANTASIA 2000 has been a labor of love for Roy E. Disney, who is refusing to re-

lease the film until perfect. This has caused production delays, fueling rumors of escalating cost, which were denied last year by Feature Animation Vice President, Thomas Schumacher, in a Los Angeles Times article. Rumors and taste aside, this will no doubt be one of Disney's most eagerly awaited animated features, when it premieres on New Year's Eve, 1999.

◆ The year 2000 brings *KINGDOM OF THE SUN*, a Peruvian-themed remake of *THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER*, in which a lowly llama herder named Pacha (animated by Ruben Aquino) finds himself a dead ringer for the selfish prince. *KINGDOM* will be directed by Roger Allers (*THE LION KING*) and Mark Dindal (*CAT'S DON'T DANCE*; now back at Disney).

◆ Also in the works is *DINOSAUR*, Disney's first "in house" all-computer animated feature that will tell a *BAMBI*-like tale of the last dinosaurs on Earth; *TREASURE PLANET*, a science fiction take on the Stevenson classic, *Treasure Island*, from *HERCULES*' directors Ron Clements and John Musker; *ATLANTIS*, a wide-screen actioner about the undersea lost city, from Kirk Wise and Gary Trousdale (*BEAUTY AND THE BEAST* and *HUNCHBACK*); and *JOHN HENRY*, a short-subject based on the folk tale about the man who challenged the steam engine, which will serve as the directing debut of animator Mark Henn and will be produced at Disney's Florida Studio.

The vital signs are good, the patient seems to be recovering. Now, will someone apply a set of jumper cables to Euro Disneyland? **AFQ**



ANIMALS FARMED: Donald Duck gets his own segment in *FANTASIA 2000*, backed up by Mickey in traditional "Sorcerer's Apprentice" robes. Despite rumors, Lennon & McCartney are conspicuous by their absence.

THE ELEGANT ENIGMAS OF

MAMORU OSHII

The director of BEAUTIFUL DREAMER and GHOST IN THE SHELL talks about rabid fans, irate producers, and the sublime bliss of confounding the audience.

by HAROLD
DAVID

Beware indulging your dreams — they might not let you go. Be cautious of technology — that which was built to help might one day rebel. Don't be seduced by the promise of artificial intelligence — you might end up surrendering your soul. Listen to the director — he has a few questions for you.

No stranger to the ambivalent temper of our times, director Mamoru Oshii has confronted issues that few of his contemporaries would dare entertain — the nature of reality; the validity of the human soul. In the process, he's managed to create works of singular originality and bracing, visual innovation. In such films as URUSEI YATSURA 2: BEAUTIFUL DREAMER and GHOST IN THE SHELL, he has raised the bar on

anime's ability to tackle the bigger issues. Audiences have emerged all the richer for his efforts.

Oshii initially fell into the animation industry after answering a magazine ad for Tatsunoko Production, the producers of SPEED RACER and GATCHAMAN. He

worked on GATCHAMAN 2 and assorted baseball dramas for the company, then moved on to Studio Pierrot, where under director Eiko Toriumi he contributed to NIRUSU NO FUSHIGI NA TABI (roughly translated as THE ADVENTURES OF NILES). "I acquired my direction skills from him," said Oshii.

Those skills would come in handy when Oshii eventually moved to URUSEI YATSURA, a.k.a. THOSE OBNOXIOUS ALIENS. Based on the successful manga by renowned artist Rumiko Takahashi, the story of irredeemable, teenage lech Ataru and his courtship by sweet, tiger-bikini'd alien nymphet Lum (to Ataru's eternal mortification) became a breakout hit in Japan, spurring an OVA

RIGHT: Haunted humanity: Conflicted cyborg Major Kusanagi questions her own humanity, and the world's flirtation with burgeoning technology, in Oshii's GHOST IN THE SHELL. **BELOW:** Director Mamoru Oshii (front, center, in characteristic basset hound T-shirt) with the GHOST IN THE SHELL crew.

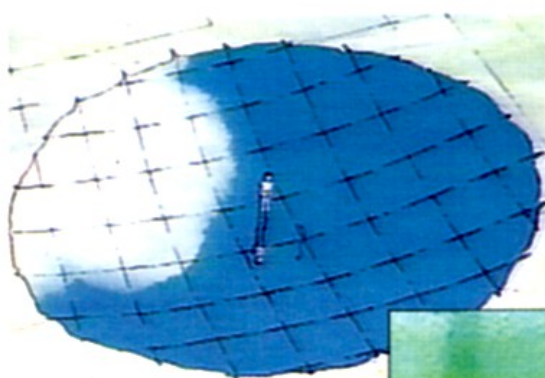




series and six feature films.

None of which endeared Oshii to his subject matter, or its creator. "I had to struggle with the ideas and views of the original writer," the director pointed out, tactfully avoiding mention of Takahashi's name, "and also with opinions and comments from her manga fans. I remember receiving threatening letters on a daily basis, as well as being involved in various troubles which made the company almost fire me. I only met with the original writer a couple of times — there is no friendship between us.

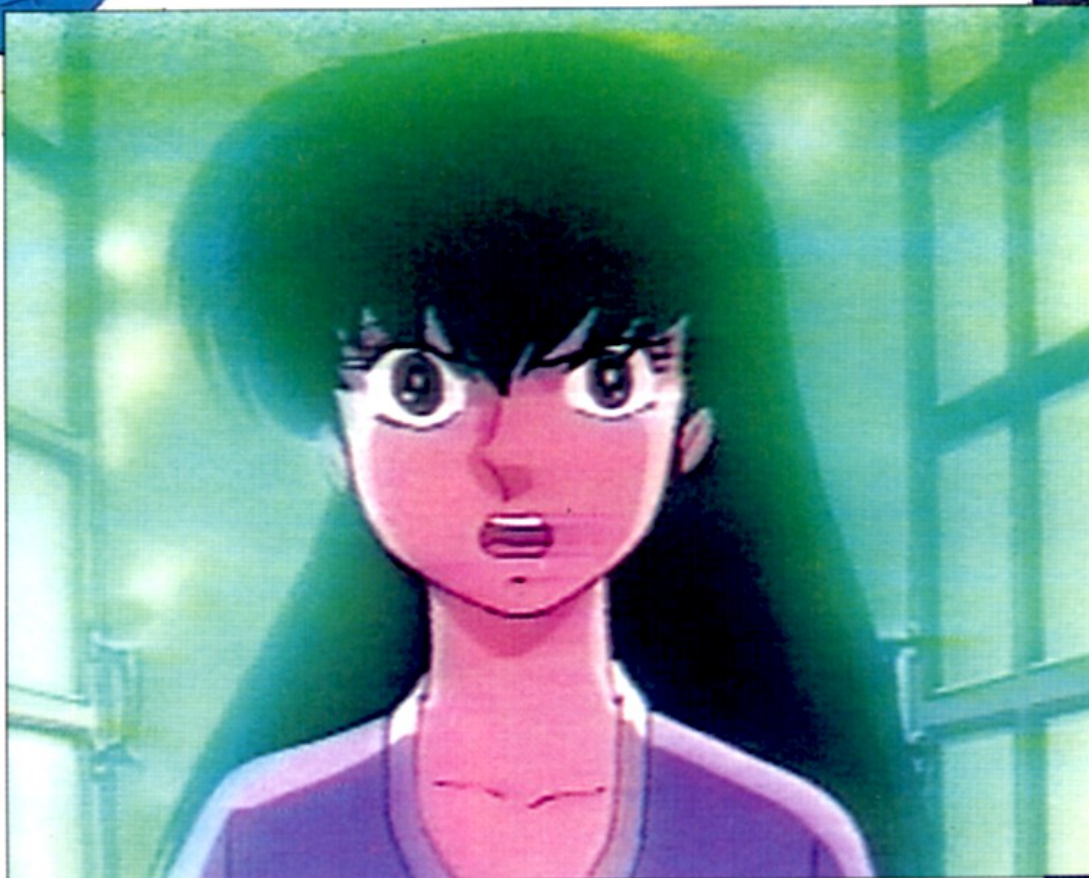
"I could not force myself to



love her characters, which are created from the female point of view, nor could she [bring herself to like what I was doing with them]. I ignored all opinions and comments from her fans and continued working with the series. Towards the end, the fans finally came to realize that anime and manga are different, and stopped their opposition."

The conflagrations on the TV series ceased long enough for Oshii to direct the first two URUSEI YATSURA features: ONLY YOU and BEAUTIFUL DREAMER. While ONLY YOU hewed to anticipated Takahashi parameters — a prearranged marriage threatens Lum and Ataru's relationship, while the wealthy and generally insufferable Mendou is slated to be deep-frozen by another beautiful, alien princess — 1984's BEAUTIFUL DREAMER was something else altogether. Starting off in semi-GROUNDHOG DAY mode (although anticipating that film by about ten years) as the entire cast repeatedly relives "the day before the school festival," DREAMER eventually metamorphoses into something considerably more exotic and elusive. The very fabric of reality begins to tear, the characters realizing that, in a strange takeoff on *The Legend of the Monkey King*, the entire whole of their township has been set on a giant stone turtle apparently making its space-

bound way to the Dragon Palace. Filled with typical, URUSEI YATSURA antics — one student capers around in a Darth Vader outfit during the school festival preparation sequences, while another group has oddly decided to replicate a WWII, German tavern, complete with flashing, neon swastikas and an operational, war-surplus tank — DREAMER also represents the first, readily accessible indication (at least for those works available to U.S. audiences) of Oshii's reach for some-



thing deeper. Such sequences as a spooky, midnight supply run — accented by the abrupt appearance of a *chindonya* band (promoting a store sale; a common enough sight in Japan, but not at midnight and not with musicians who lack any trace of facial features) — and a conversation with a stock, comic-relief cabdriver that turns abruptly ominous show the director gaining facility in melding the popular with the cerebral.

"I expressed in the film how I personally feel towards our daily lives," said Oshii. "I feel that the biggest appeal of a film is the releasing of the audience from the real world. I believe that it was entertaining for the audience to see an unstable world reproduced very realistically."

The delve into more adventurous plotting and more striking visuals — one notable moment has Mendou standing alone in a plaza slowly filling with water, the blue of the sky gradually spreading under his feet — came at an almost subliminal cost: for a series about a perky young alien/oni and her bristly relationship with a reluctant Earthling, BEAUTIFUL DREAMER does its level-best to nudge Lum, her otherworldly cohorts, and even Ataru to the periphery, treating them largely as members of a rather sizable ensemble. "I stressed the point that we are living in a world that has no meanings, and that the common sense and knowledge which support our daily lives are extremely unstable and untrustworthy," Oshii ex-

plained. "It was difficult to portray a realistic daily lifestyle using the alien characters from [Takahashi's] original story. Therefore, I chose the protagonist's friends as the main characters, which brought further opposition from her and her fans."

Things went more smoothly on Oshii's PATLABOR OVA series. The adventures of a near-future, robotic police force dedicated



ANTIC MENACE: Oshii defied both fans and creator Rumiko Takahashi to turn BEAUTIFUL DREAMER into a lyrical rumination on the perils of dreams.



to the task of corralling renegade Labors, a.k.a. utility robots, the series spent surprisingly little time with its titular Patrol Labors, and devoted far more footage to the idiosyncratic dynamics of the humans who operated them (all the way to a first episode in which the vast majority of screen time was occupied with the characters' vigil for their undelivered Labors). "I had no interest in the giant robot itself," Oshii admitted. "I was more interested in the systems and people that support the robot."

That was something more clearly evident in Oshii's two PATLABOR features. While PATLABOR MOVIE 1 still retains the basic parameters of a PATLABOR episode — extensive detective work; a humorous, occasionally jokey, ambience; sporadic lapses into cartoonish caricature — PATLABOR MOVIE 2 was a harbinger of all that would come in Oshii's future work. Gone is the simplified, video drawing style, replaced by lush, three-dimensional artwork. Subdued is the humor, replaced by a disquieting plot in which a military theorist struggles, through a campaign of mecha-



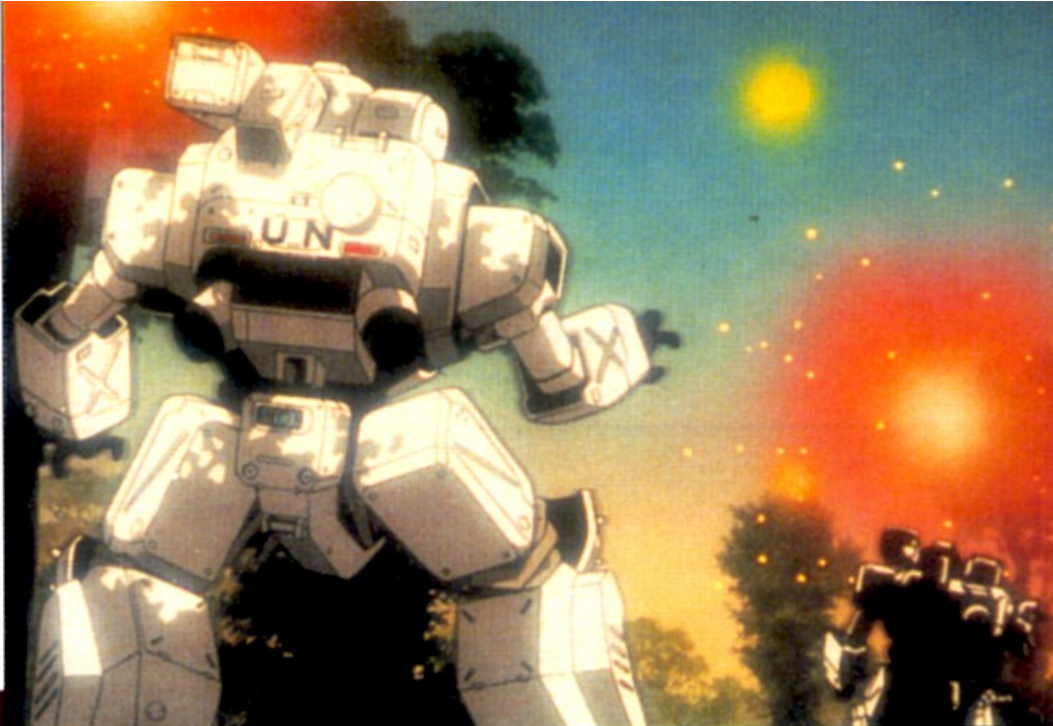
age-group audience became interested."

If PATLABOR 2 was the warning shot, GHOST IN THE SHELL was the logical culmination. Departing significantly from manga artist Masamune Shirow's designs, Oshii created a seductive, dangerous future cityscape in

nized terror, to return Japan to its warlike past. Said Oshii, "I wanted to talk about a bigger theme, so I made [PATLABOR 2] in more of a serious and realistic style. I believe that it is necessary to change and vary the reality of the background and characters, according to your theme."

The results were impressive: images of modern Tokyo under full siege were abutted with sequences of citizens attempting to get on with their lives while under military protection; action thrills were suspended for an unsettling sequence in which two characters discussed Japan's place in post-WWII politics. For Oshii, the jump in gravity was a step in the right direction, although some corners of his traditional audience were rather taken aback: "I don't believe that you need to restrict the levels and contents of an anime film just because it's anime. It's not only myself who believes that way, [Hayao] Miyazaki [director of PRINCESS MONONOKE] and other directors also believe that. The reaction in Japan was... Fans were confused, but mainstream critics and the older

which cyborg operative Major Motoko Kusanagi struggled to understand the parameters of her own soul. Further extending his visual palette, Oshii incorporated CG into the production to depict the world from Kusanagi's eyes, and to extend the range of imagery depicted in the people-choked streets. As intriguing as the parallel between increas-



its ability to both embrace and question a potential future in which civilization extends itself through the blessings of technology, but in the process runs the risk of losing the very humanity it entrusts to its creations. "I believe," said Oshii, "that humans are animals who cannot be saved by any forms of biological evolution or progress. So here comes the question:

ABOVE AND RIGHT: Oshii's PATLABOR 2 suspended traditional mecha action for a disturbing examination of Tokyo under siege. **BELOW:** Mamoru Oshii during L.A. mixing of GHOST IN THE SHELL.



ing mechanization behind the camera and the rise of tech on-screen might seem, though, the director rejected any attempt to derive deeper meaning from the conjunction: "There is not a direct connection of theme. It's more 'scheme-wise.' [I revised the animation process] from the direction standpoint, using what I call a 'layout system,' and from the technological scheme through the consistent application of CG and digital composite."

More than just a stunning visual feast, GHOST represented a signal achievement in

what can save us? Ideology? Religion? I asked myself if I could possibly have technology change our future. I want to believe in that possibility. The future could be as you describe it: alluring and frightening. Whether it's Heaven or Hell, whether [GHOST's prime antagonist] the Puppet Master is good or evil, you must decide on your own."

Oshii demonstrated his own faith in the wildly allegorical ANGEL'S EGG, a controversial, religious fantasy that has yet to see the light of U.S. store shelves. While we wait for that title, though, there remains the rest of Oshii's *oeuvre* to enjoy, a catalog that distinguishes itself for its faith in the audience, a faith undergoing its greatest test as his works receive notice across the Pacific.

"I don't personally create works based on their potential beyond Japan," Oshii concluded. "Misinterpretation of films is unavoidable, but one should not be afraid of it. How my work is interpreted, studied, or experienced is not my business, but my audience's."

AFQ

BEHIND THE BOARDS

SMEAR THAT SNOWMAN!

DAN
PERSONS



Singing animals. Happy snowmen. Cloying atmosphere. Don't you *hate* animated Xmas specials? A couple of years ago, the folks at ESPN2 decided to do something about it in their promo for the Winter X-Games. As realized by Olive Jar Studios producer Piper Rankine and director Flip Johnson and as described by executive producer Matthew Chard, this stop-motion animated gem demonstrates how much work it takes to reduce a beloved, anthropomorphized winter icon to road Slushee.



Snowman and animals walk towards the camera...
VO: "I love this wintery time of year."

Olive Jar owns two motion-control rigs, neither of which were used in order to give this opening track-in a genuine, '60s-style clunkiness.

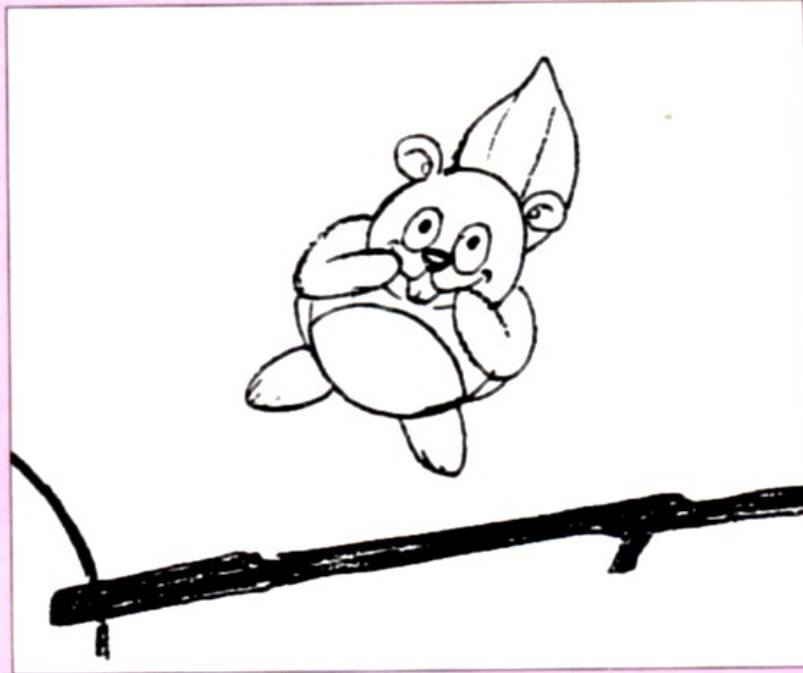


As the camera dollies in...
VO: "When we all put on our favorite TOP HAT and our favorite smile."

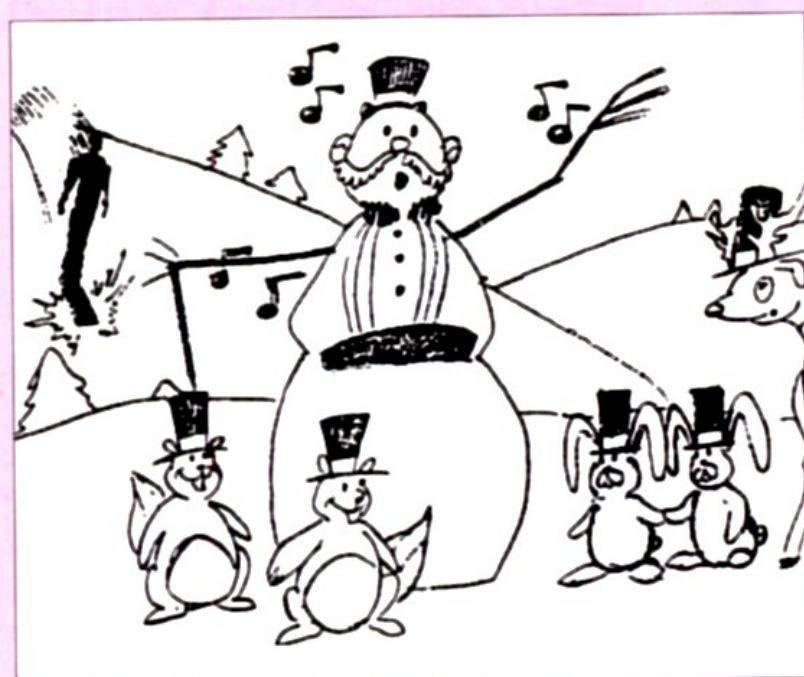
More '60s redux: Snowman was composed of three styro-foam balls, coated with a glitter and Bondo mixture, and detailed with construction paper and clay.



Snowman turns towards chipmunk.



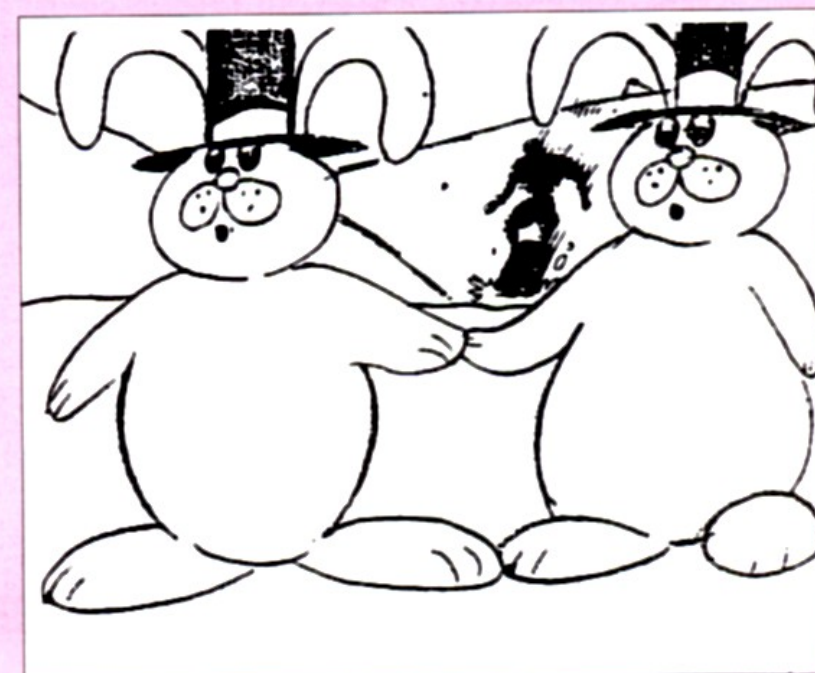
Chipmunk covers mouth and giggles.



Characters pull top hats from behind their backs and begin to sing. First snowboarder approaches from distant hills.

There were three snowboarder models built for this spot. The one in this shot was three inches tall.

Chipmunk was a wire armature, covered with pillow foam and stitched felt. Felt-covered cardboard was used for face details.



There is no "second snowboarder" in the finished commercial. Chard: "There was probably a reason for timing that we ended up not putting the second snowboarder in."

Dolly to left on singing animals. Second snowboarder approaches from distant hills. VO: (Rabbits) "We are the animals of the North Pole..."



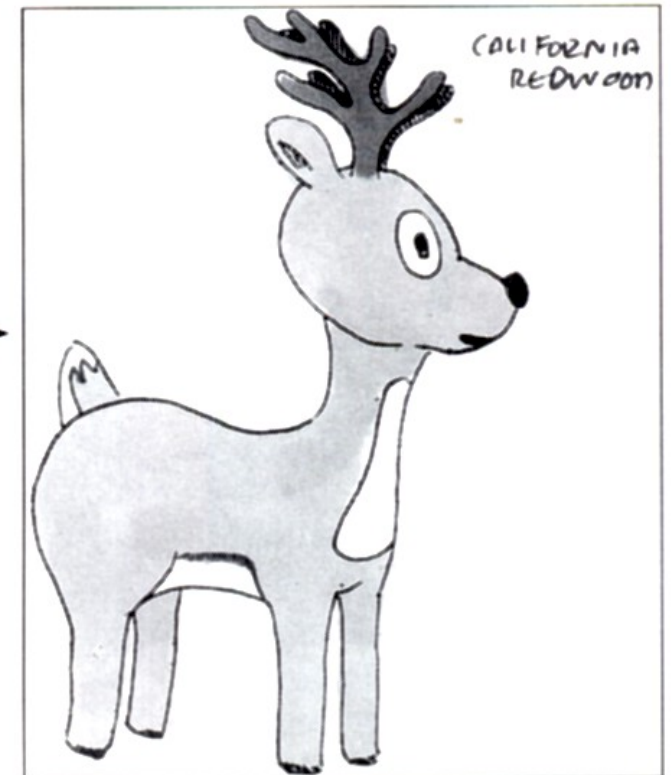
Dolly ends on singing chipmunks. VO: (Chipmunks) "We wear top hats because it's cold..."

What do directors do? In Johnson's case, he makes sure that, although it's not scripted, the chipmunks are visibly shivering as they sing the word "cold."

Although the reindeer's wire armature permitted movement of its legs, the creature never actually "walks" during the spot.



All animals sing.
VO: "We like snowmen..."



California Redwood refers to the color of the deer's antlers.

The ten foot by ten foot set was composed of a white styrofoam ground, with styrofoam trees and mountains. The snow was an underlayer of white glue, covered with a mixture of laundry detergent, glitter, and sugar. Chard: "The interesting problem with shooting this was keeping the ants away."



First snowboarder sails into frame... performs aerial maneuver before...
VO: "...Because..."



... landing and taking out...
VO: "They're..."

According to Chard, this is how the client described the following shots: "It's a calamity out there. It's just a damn mess. These snowboarders have wreaked havoc." Anyone who's gone skiing in the past five years will recognize the sentiment.

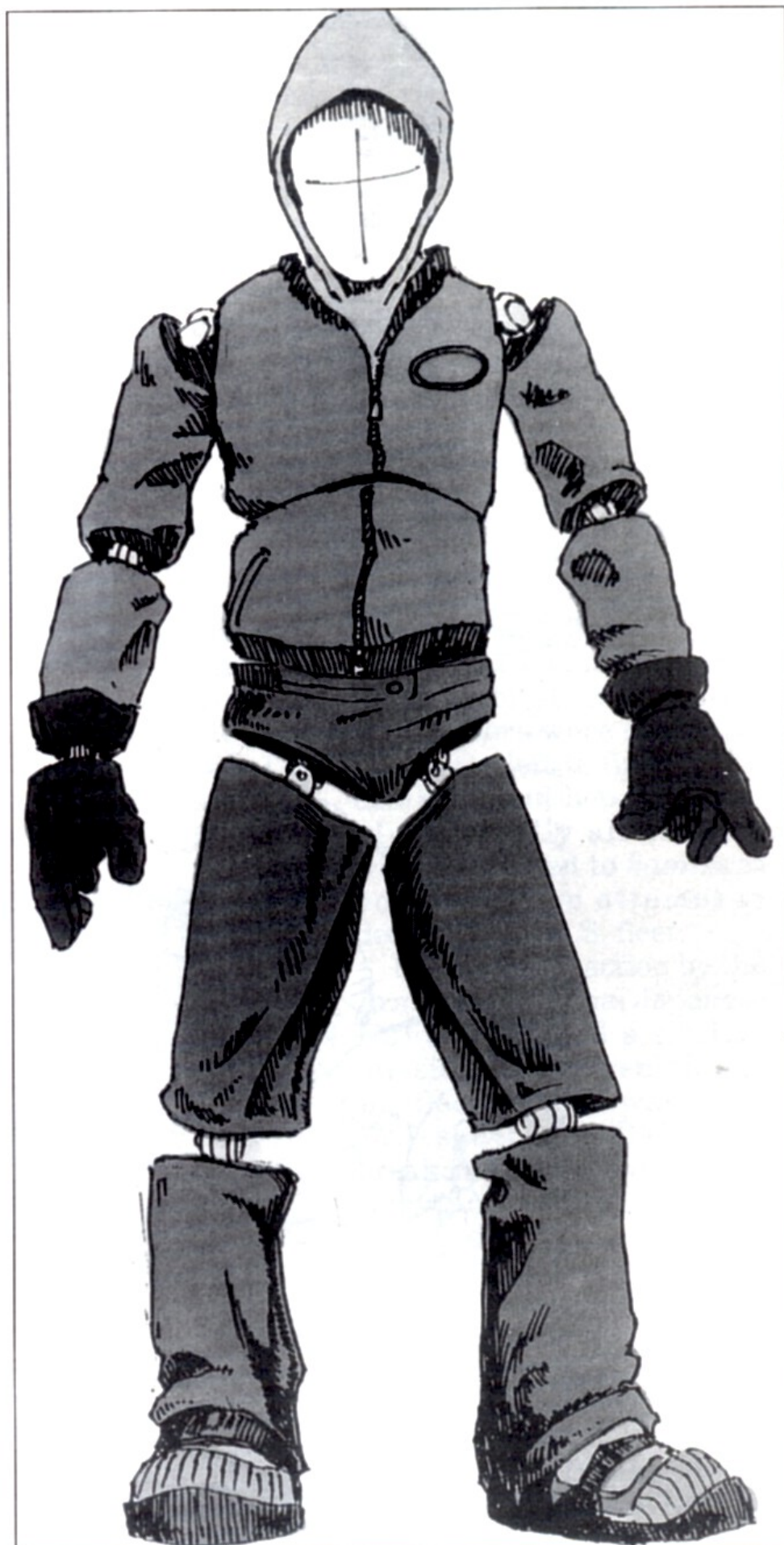


The Chipmunk!
VO: "NICE"



Stuffing and body parts fly. Snowman is impaled by chipmunk arm.
VO: "What the hell!..."

This was the cable version. "Heck" was substituted for the broadcast version.



This ten-inch snowboarder is the most elaborate model in the spot. Chard: "It was a hard puppet with a ball-and-socket armature. It was very intricate and able to be animated much more smoothly."



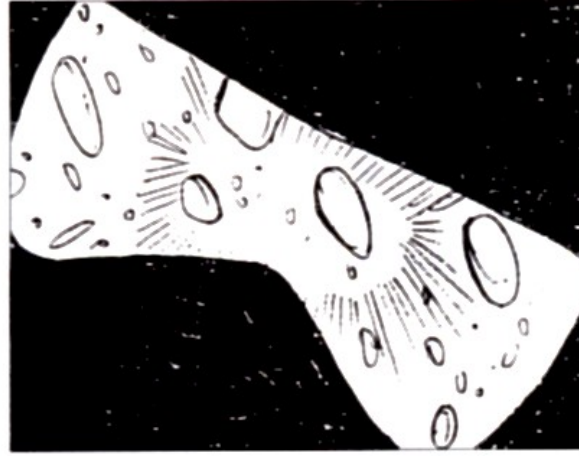
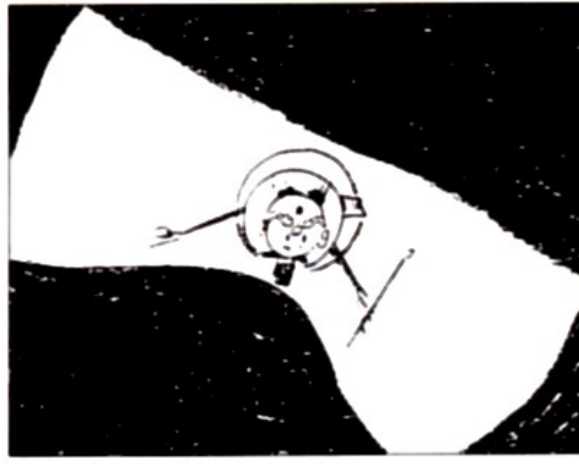
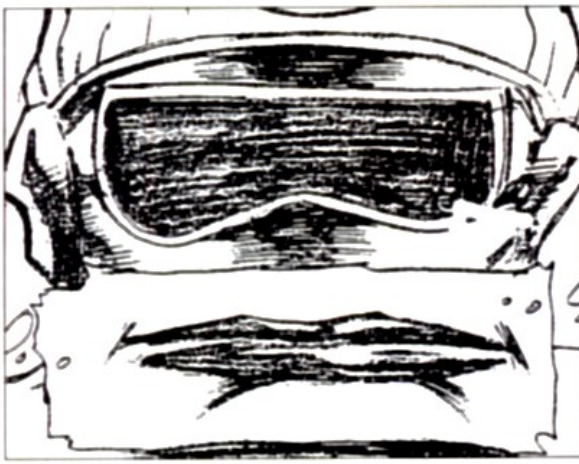
Tracking shot. Snowboarder 2 hits mogul and becomes airborne, leaving frame.



Snowman frantically looks around as chipmunk arm twitches in his side. Smashed chipmunk head still sings and tail twitches in snow.
VO: "We also like them..."

It was decided that the arm twitching bit might be a tad much: the arm just sticks out of the snowman's side.





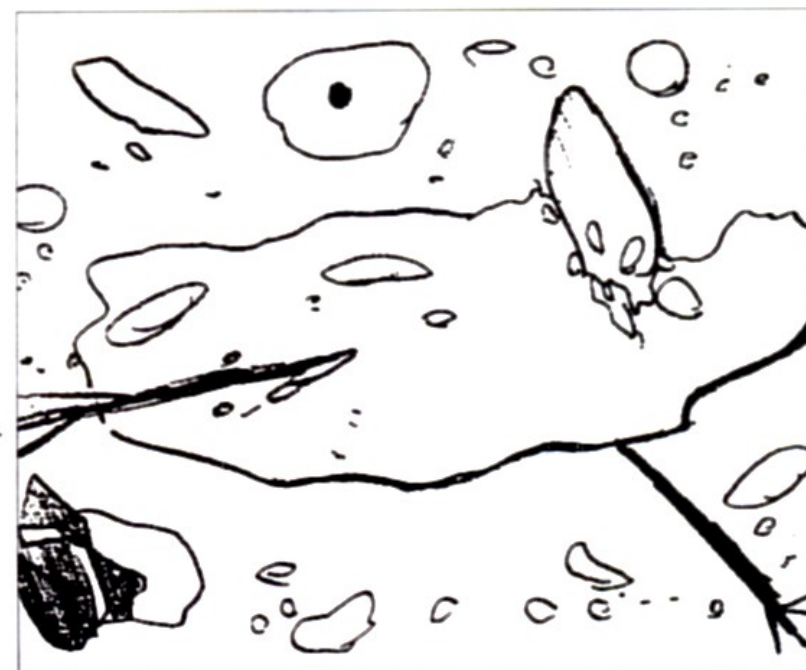
Snowboarder 2 wipes out snowman
VO: "cause... they're... made... of...
ice..."



Snowman is jolted into 3 broken balls with
feverishly twitching stick arms.

The cutting is significantly different from
what was boarded. Starting after shot
where boarder hits mogul, the actual
sequence is: CU snowboarder's face;
shot of snowman looking frantically;
snowboarder's POV closing on snow-
man; shot of snowboarder closing on
camera; back to snowboarder POV with
snowman close and out of focus; 1
black frame; continuation of previous
POV shot, snowman now very close
and very out of focus.

They don't so much twitch feverishly as
wave helplessly. Which, apparently,
was deemed a more suitable ending
than...



Alternate. Snowman is smashed to bits with
twitching arms.

Yup. AFG

WE'RE OFF TO OKINAWA: THE REAL YAMATO (PART I)

RUSSELL J.
HANDELMAN

The war was not going well. On all fronts, the enemy had advanced almost unchecked, defeating outlying garrisons or else bypassing and isolating them, until their invasion of the nearest outpost, from which their attacks could devastate the cities and the capital unchecked, had begun.

All that remained of the fleet were a few small, lightly armed vessels, scarcely a match for the enemy's task force—except for one. She was the largest of her type ever constructed, with armor thought to be all but impenetrable, armed with weapons that could outrange and outgun any single vessel the enemy had.

The word had come down from headquarters. Accompanied by her escort—a few destroyers and one cruiser—she was to be fueled with just enough for a one-way trip. She was the last hope of relieving the garrison, of breaking the siege and stopping the invasion. Failure would mean utter extinction....

By now, the scenario may seem familiar, yet the time is not the 23rd century but April 1945. Many North American anime fans who date their initial interest to a TV series titled *STAR BLAZERS* may have puzzled over why the space battleship *Argo* bore such a striking resemblance to a 20th century warship. In the original Japanese episodes, the ship's actual name was *Yamato*, a Second World War battleship raised from the ocean floor and refitted for space warfare. But why would there be such reverence for a single warship, one obviously defeated in battle in a losing war?

For more than 60 years, *Yamato* has been a part of Japanese cultural conscious-

ness; more than just another steel warship, she has a mythic significance difficult for Western observers to appreciate. *Yamato* was born in 1934, when an increasingly militant Japan broke off a series of naval arms negotiations with the United States and Great Britain. Reasoning that the greater enemy would be the United States, which would be unwilling to maintain a full two-ocean navy, the Imperial Japanese Navy concluded that they would construct a class of super-battleships which would outweigh and outgun any ship that the United States

Her three turrets each mounting three 18.1 guns were the largest ever installed, capable of firing one and a half ton shells distances of over 20 miles.

With almost cosmic irony, *Yamato* was launched a few days after the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 signalled the primacy of carrier-borne aircraft over surface ships. *Yamato*, the Imperial Japanese Navy's flagship, was destined to play no significant strategic or tactical part in the war. No one was certain what to do with her, since she had been constructed in prepara-

Navy rested at the bottom of the Pacific. With the American landings on Okinawa, only a few hundred miles from Kyushu (southernmost of the Japanese Home Islands), the military leaders concluded that the only way to bring about anything other than unconditional surrender would be to make the upcoming battles so costly that the Allies would negotiate a settlement rather than invade the Japanese homeland. Over 100,000 Japanese soldiers were dug in on Okinawa, left to fight to the death without hope of resupply. Virtually all aircraft were converted to *kamikaze* bombers in an attempt to decimate the U.S. fleet.

Shamed into action by the Army, the Imperial Japanese Navy concocted a similar mission for the remains of the fleet. *Yamato* was to set sail south for Okinawa, break through the American fleet and ultimately run aground on the island, her crew joining the defenders, her main batteries firing on the American amphibious units. Accompanied only by small escort, she could count on no air cover; a wave of *kamikaze* attacks were scheduled to precede her and theoretically disable the American carriers. There would be no doubts that this was to be the fleet's last action; the ships would only be fueled with enough for a one-way trip.

In a touching act of loyalty to their fellow seamen, the personnel running the fuel depot defied orders and tapped secret, unreported reserves to give the ships, including *Yamato*, enough fuel to return home. As we shall see in the next issue of *AFQ*, it was a gesture touchingly noble in intent, but doomed to insignificance in the conflict to come.

AFQ



ARGO MY OWN WAY: The American distributors of *SPACE BATTLESHIP YAMATO* changed the craft's name, robbing the vessel of its historical significance.

Navy might devise.

The first of its class, *Yamato* was named for the district surrounding the ancient city of Nara, the first Imperial capital. By her very name, *Yamato* was to be identified with the essential spirit of the Japanese nation.

When completed, she clearly outclassed any warship that ever sailed. With a displacement of nearly 73,000 tons, she outweighed the largest American battleships by over 30,000 tons.

tion for the *kassen kantai*, the "decisive fleet action," in which *Yamato* and her sisters would engage and overwhelm the American fleet.

Not until October 1944, at the battle of Leyte Gulf, did she first fire her guns in anger, briefly opening up on lightly defended American troop transports as the bulk of the U.S. fleet was successfully decoyed away by the last of the Japanese aircraft-carriers. By April 1945, most of the Imperial Japanese



KOREAN

CONQUERORS

*THEY'RE THE
SECRET WEAPONS OF AMERICAN &
JAPANESE ANIMATION STUDIOS*

*NOW, TWO KOREAN COMPANIES SEEK TO
BECOME PLAYERS WITH A PAIR OF
BIG-ACTION, FEATURE ANIMES*

For years now, more and more Korean names have popped up in the credits of anime films. The Koreans have been animating the popular SIMPSONS TV show since its inception. Now two Korean companies have entered the world of feature-length anime, which have been prepared and distributed in the U.S. by Manga Entertainment.

Dai-Won Animation Co. Ltd. produced the film RED HAWK, a magic and martial-arts anime film. Directed by Jung Yul Hwang and written by Ju Wan So and Sang Wol Ji, RED HAWK's plot is set in the land of Chungwon, and follows a trio of adolescents — a blue-eyed, red-haired young martial artist named Dan-yong, a green-haired female martial artist named Myung Myung, and Hong yung, the daughter of a dead craftsman — as they search for the famed hero, Red Hawk. When the women are threatened, Red Hawk and his avian mascot (a red hawk, natch) come to the rescue, vexing the minions of the evil Lord Seobong, who have been undercutting the region's stability by disseminating counterfeit currency (no doubt a reflection of the real instabilities in current-day Korea).

ARMAGEDDON, meanwhile, was created by Dae Woo Electronics Ltd. and written, executive-produced and directed by Hyunse Lee. The initial Seoul, Korea setting is itself unusual, serving as the launch-point for an ambitious science fiction extravaganza that spans time from the creation of the Earth to its final conflict. The tale focuses on the Delta Boy, a living avatar of the supercomputer that began life on Earth. He falls for Marie Pandora, who has been sent to protect him and who ends up giving her life to save him from a Mechagodzilla-like killer sent to destroy him. Delta Boy winds up working under Queen Hera, Pandora's equally beautiful twin sister, and Hades, her companion, to stave off the invasion of Earth by minions of the evil supercomputer 66/66.

Lacking an already in-place distribution system, and having worked for the Japanese for years, the Korean studios that produced these films were forced to send their work to Japan for worldwide distribution. For years, Japanese animation studios have been using Korean companies for coloring, while the primary creative work was done in Japan, much in the same way that Nike designs sneakers in the U.S. and then farms out the actual manufacturing process to other countries.

Japan has set a benchmark for other nations to reach. In both these films there are echoes of familiar anime themes (the

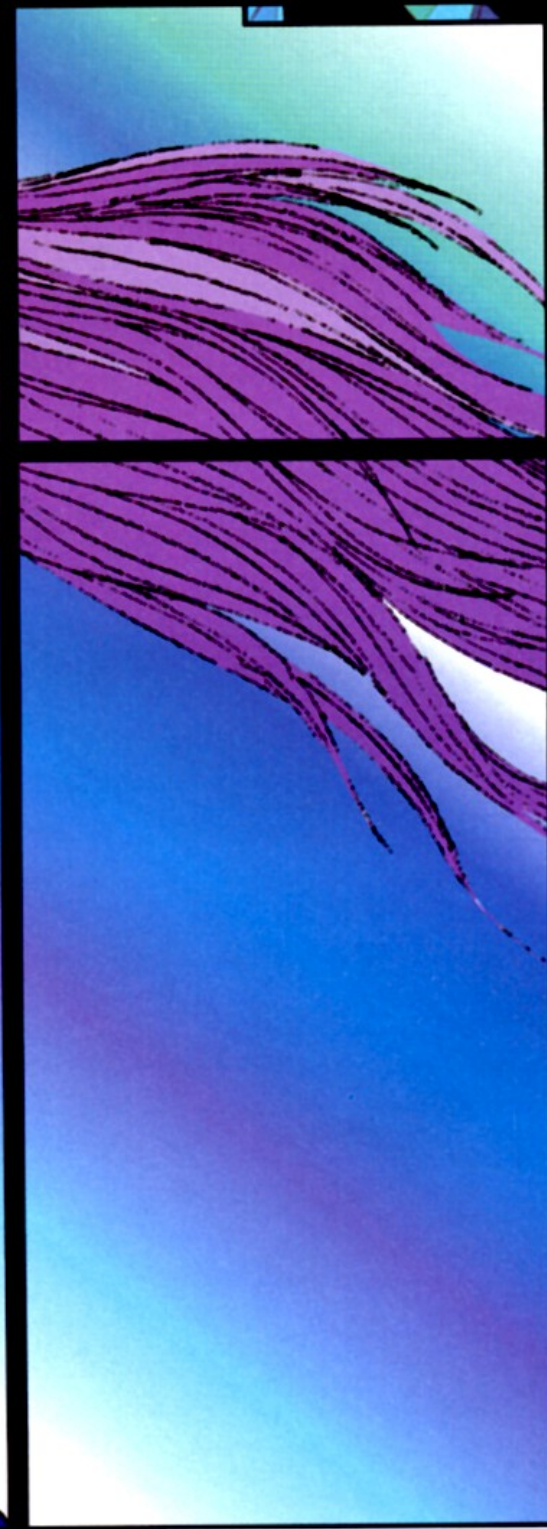
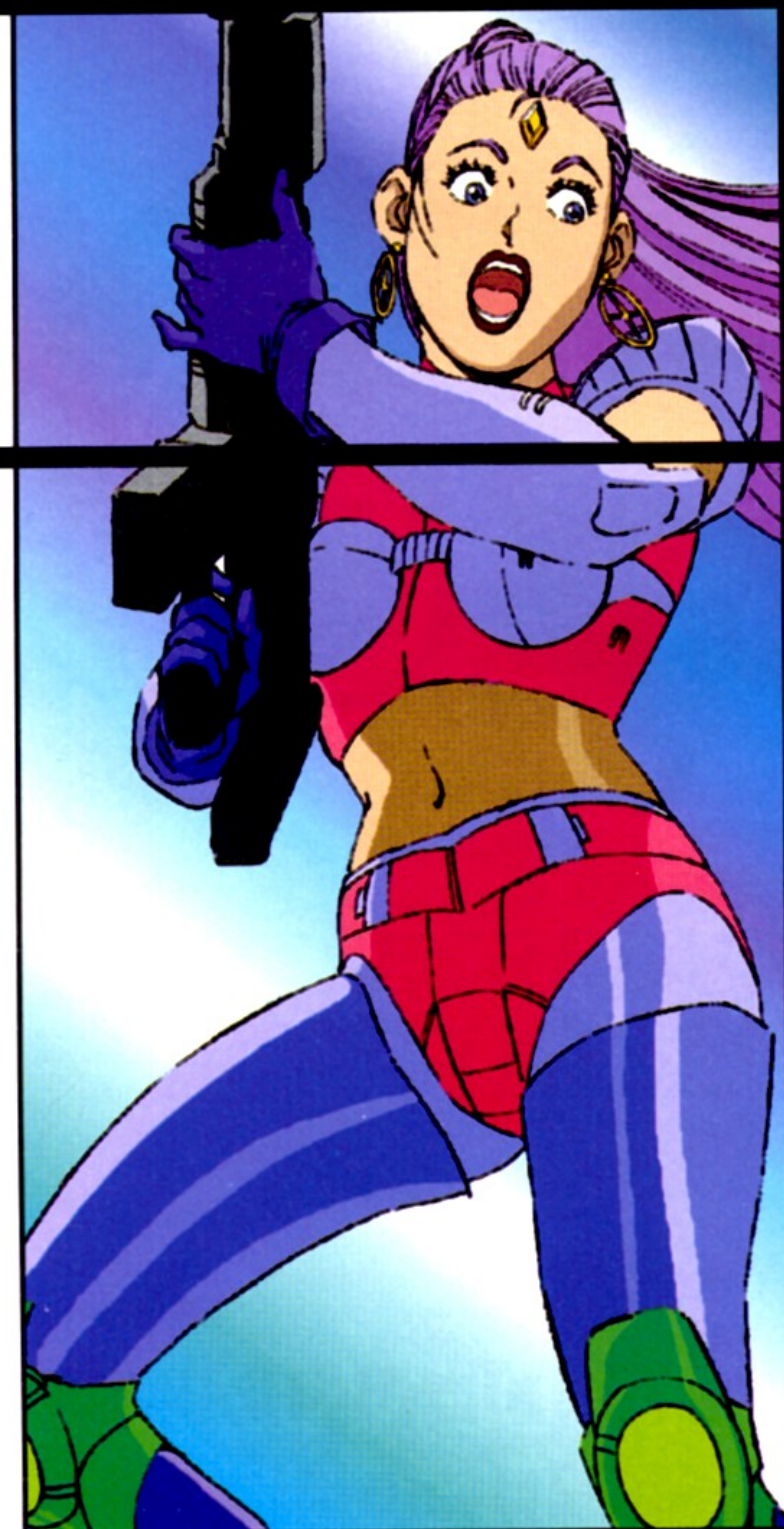
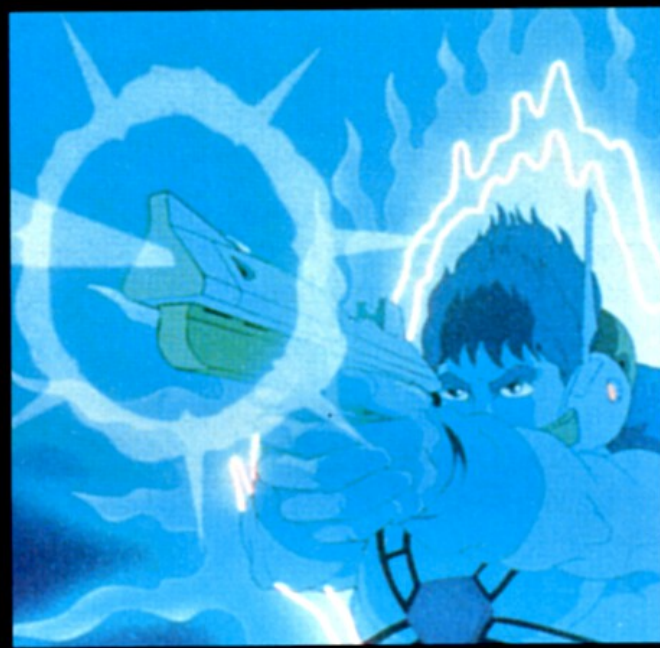
USING THE FORCE: RED HAWK unmasked (below) blasts the baddies, while battle-mate Myung Myung (left) relies on more conventional weaponry. Together, they do their part in a civil war not a little reminiscent of politics in current-day Korea.



by DENNIS
FISCHER

destruction of the world, million year legacies, a schoolboy who saves humankind for ARMAGEDDON; familial conflict, brothers at war, and a masked hero for RED HAWK). However, they are landmark films, both for the quality of their animation, and for the fact that they are the first two features to have been originated in and entirely produced in Korea.

No doubt many more will follow. "A lot of money will be coming from Korea to fund a lot of these projects," predicts Chris Bottone, coordinator for Manga Entertainment in England. "Because we started off with Japanese animation, we know a hell of a lot more about the Japanese companies that produce animation. I think there is something to be said for the fact that both RED HAWK and ARMAGEDDON were licensed from quite big Japanese companies as opposed to being licensed directly from



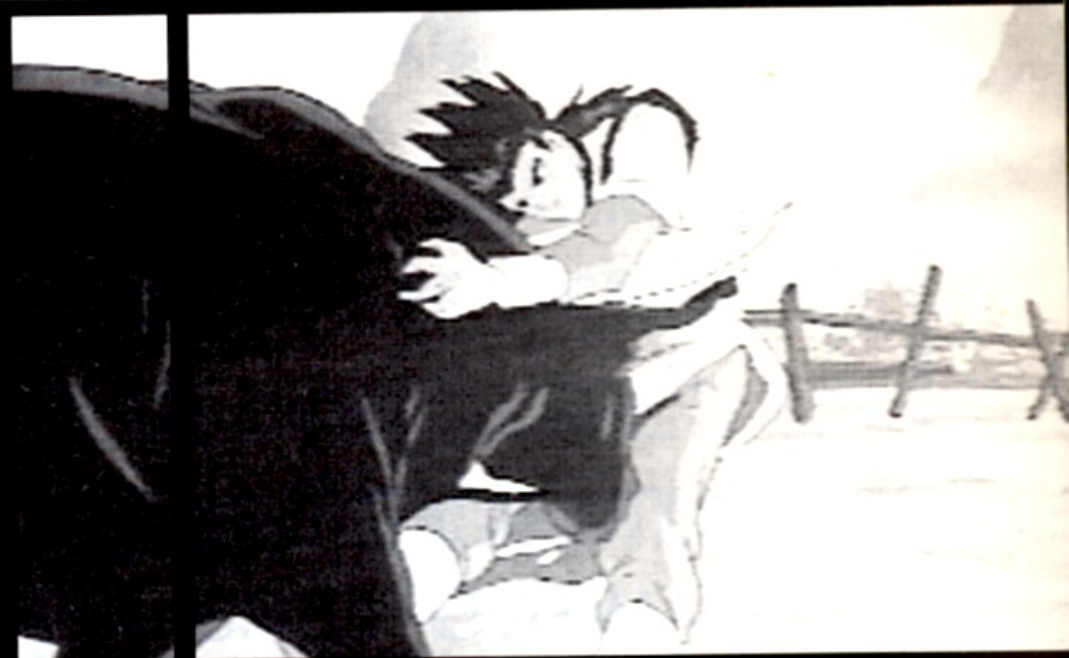
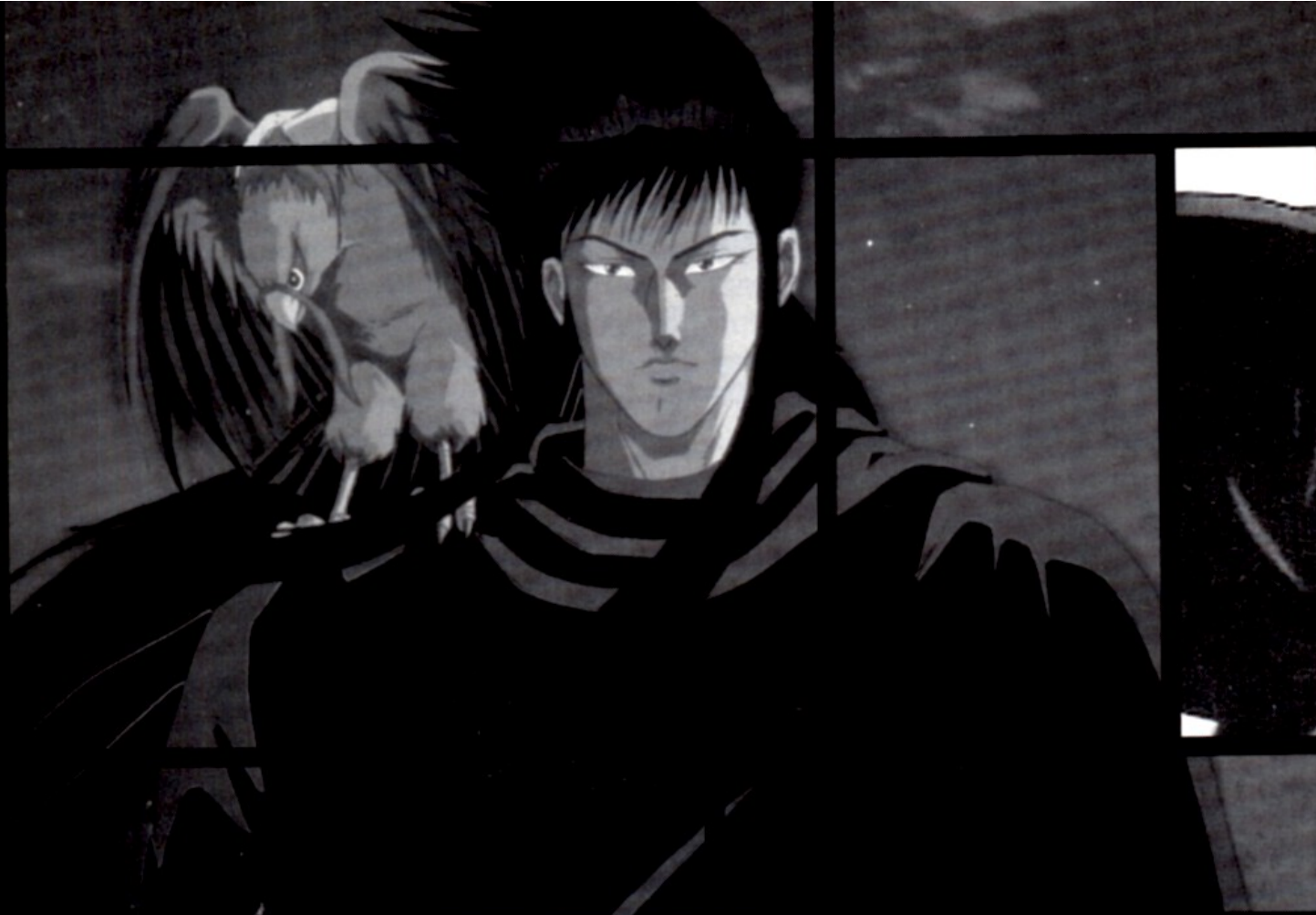
their source. [RED HAWK came from Kodansha, and ARMAGEDDON was Nippon Cine TV Corp.]

"On these two [films, the creative heads] come from Korea exclusively, but the fact that Japanese companies are selling them abroad means that [the Koreans] don't quite have the business structure. Either that or they sold it to the Japanese company outright, and the Japanese sold the rights to us, since they didn't have a distribution network in Europe and the U.S."

Manga specializes in Japanese animation, and the two films came to their attention through Japanese licensors. "Without them," said Bottone, "it would have been doubtful that we would have seen the films, let alone bought the rights for them, and we wouldn't have the smooth transition. Both of [the Japanese] companies are big boys in the field, and they wouldn't buy shit, they wouldn't represent crap. They decided to take it on and get them to us."

"There is every chance that there is more

DARWIN WARRIORS: ARMAGEDDON's powered-up Delta Boy (top) finds a savior in purple-haired, cosmic buttinsky Pandora (left) and her blond-haired twin, Queen Hera (above). Okay, so they don't look too much alike. You never heard of fraternal twins?



that will be brought to light," he added. "These films aren't bad, and they have had a decent success over here and in the States. Lawrence Guinness was the person responsible for buying the films for our company — he's the director of acquisitions and senior vice president of the company, working with Marvin Gleicher, our CEO. In general, Manga is one of the first to bring Korean an-

BROTHER ACT: Four faces of RED HAWK: a martial-arts Zorro protecting his countrypeople from economic instability.

do a lot of work on the sound that was really rough. It was not just that the sound was bad, but there were technical problems with the time codes and such."

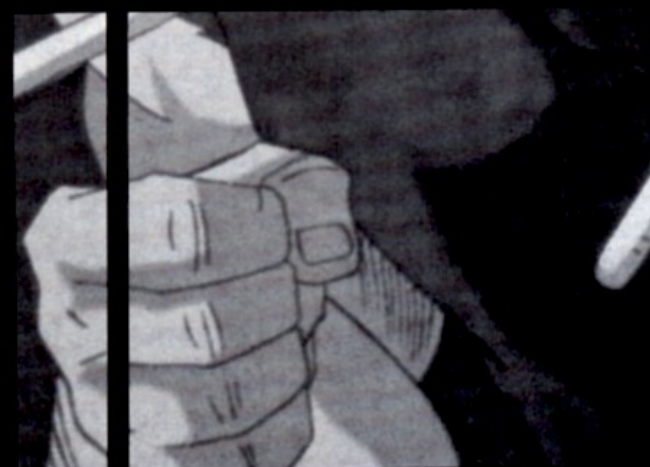
The style of each film echoes the work of Japanese artists, while remaining uniquely its own. "It's certainly different," notes Bottone. "You know immediately when you look at it that it's not Japanese animation, but by the same token you also know that it's not Western. I think the [popular] themes

CONTINUED ON PAGE 21



imation to the mainstream."

Of the two films, Bottone found ARMAGEDDON the more difficult to deal with. "They were aiming very high with their standards for the storyline," he said. "A storyline that is that intricate — literally about the history of the Earth itself, and Armageddon — is a huge story which could have made two or three films. I think quite a lot of it was done in the States as well, including actual artwork. That one took quite a while to do. The copyright line on it should have read, 'The Armageddon Committee.' They did have to



TWO FROM KOREA

SONY OR GOLDSTAR? MANGA OFFERS UP A MIXED BAG OF ANIME ACTION

Korea as country of origin is what two feature releases from Manga Entertainment have in common. Don't jump to the conclusion, though, that if you've seen one, you can skip the other. While both films revel in vivid art and rapid-fire action, beyond those common aspects of popular anime **RED HAWK** and **ARMAGEDDON** couldn't be more different.

RED HAWK, produced by Dai-Won Animation Co. Ltd., is set in a feudal past where roving hordes of outlaws terrorize local villages (a situation familiar to all who have seen Kurosawa's classic **THE SEVEN SAMURAI**). The evil Lord Seobong has been undercutting the region's stability by disseminating counterfeit currency. To combat these threats, a mysterious martial artist dons a mask and dubs himself "the Red Hawk." Accompanied only by his companion, an actual red hawk, he travels the countryside, vowing to protect and defend the weak.

Directed by Jung Yul Hwang, written by Ju Wan So and Sang Wol Ji, **RED HAWK**'s plot centers on a trio of adolescents who are rescued by the masked hero, leading the minions of Lord Seobong to conclude that there is a connection between the youths and the supernatural martial artist. It turns out that Red Hawk is not one man, but two: when the initial Red Hawk Muk yong is transformed into a demon, his equally talented brother Dan yong assumes the role. In the finale, the brothers are squared off against each other by the forces of evil.

The film moves at a good

clip, the animation far superior to that of Manga's other Korean feature, **ARMAGEDDON**. Martial arts, though, are always more impressive in live action than animation. The story has a few interesting twists, turns, and surprises — while it does not break any new ground, it is an entertaining effort.

Set initially in modern-day Seoul, Korea, **ARMAGEDDON** focuses on the Delta Boy, a living avatar of the supercomputer that began life on Earth.



Manga Entertainment; 90 mins.;
Dubbed version reviewed

Original Author, Executive Producer, Director: Hyunse Lee

Voice Actors: David Scott, Tessa Ariel, Richard Hayworth, Maron Mann, Mona Marshall, Abe Lesser, Gil Starberry.

Manga Entertainment; 90 mins.;
Dubbed version reviewed

Executive Director: Sang Il Sim;
Supervising Director: Jung Yul Hwang

Voice Actors: Jimmy Theodore, David Swift, Charles Douglas, Tom Charles, Darian Sewell, Mona Marshall.



Combining CG imagery with standard, cel animation, the film depicts how, four billion years ago in the Andromeda Nebula, an alien race used their supercomputers to create intelligent life by seeding races on various planets. The film then makes the big leap to a pastel-colored Now, following Delta Boy as he travels across the galaxy and back, learning about his previously unsuspected powers and warring against the ultimate evil as personified by a

rival superbrain. The result is a mishmash of familiar tropes that fail to add up to anything special.

Created by Dae Woo Electronics Ltd. and written, executive produced and directed by Hyunse Lee, there are a number of ways in which **ARMAGEDDON** appears to be cutting corners. Not only do the producers repeat footage and place still shots amongst moving ones, they also take numerous opportunities to overlay voices without having to animate the lips of the characters. There are wild shifts in tone, and while Lee tries to make us care about one character's early demise, we really know nothing much about him except the company he keeps. Lacking any kind of coherent narrative, gripping mystery, or appealing characterization (Delta Boy is introduced blowing snot bubbles in class, and rates the women he sees on a scale of one to ten), the result is a disjointed mess meant to appeal to indiscriminating fans of the genre.

Two films, two basic genres, two very different results. Manga has to be commended for showing the courage to offer animation fans two titles that on the surface appear to provide what many viewers seek in Japanese anime, and yet are actually quite different. However, if any future efforts from Korea happen to find their way to these shores, let's hope they're more like the engaging and occasionally surprising adventure of **RED HAWK** and less like the incoherent catch-all of **ARMAGEDDON**.

Dennis Fischer

are reflected, but by the same token they are done from a slightly different angle which gives them a new freshness. It echoes the fact that [the Koreans] are starting out, they are not as experienced, but as far as the anime community, they will get there because they have gained the experience of making the films. They have obviously done a lot. They have the technical ability and the artistic ability. Probably what they need is wider source material."

Most Japanese anime, especially feature films, come from manga, the famed Japanese comics and graphic novels. As far as Bottone knows, Korea does not have the network of comic books and comic strips that the Japanese can draw from, and what comics they have do not boast as widely varying a range of subject matter as is found in Japan.

"That may be a key, because the comic book writers effectively call the shots,"

employs. "A lot of the time it's predetermined which ones we're going to use," said Bottone, "but at the end of the day it's nice to have some costings from different people. Get some quotes. I would find the best quote or best-set studio to do this."

"In [the case of these films], and in most cases where we are doing a feature film, a studio called ZRO Limits Productions in California handles the dubbing. I send them the materials and the scripts, and, on occasion, if we need to know who is going to sound like what, they'll send us VHS tapes

and we'll do voice actor auditions. I'll select which ones I think are the best, and dubbing goes ahead. Basically, it's my job to make sure that the bits and pieces come in on time, and that, again, the quality is of the standard that we expect."

Additionally, Bottone prepares the trailers and coordinates with Manga's marketing department, so the people there can decide how best to sell the film. "Dealing with all the audio and visual materials and the the dubbing thereof is my responsibility," said Bottone.

Manga is particularly devoted to producing a good Hi-Fi Stereo soundtrack in English, usually incorporating the original music tracks, and sometimes sweetening the original sound effects tracks. "They usually remix it," he said. "In fact, ZRO Limits remixes all the time, because sometimes the effects tracks can be cheesy, sometimes they are great. They split the two, the music and the effects track, and get a separate music and effects track, and then mix it themselves to Hi-Fi Stereo sound. We get a lot of stuff in mono — AR-

MANGA'S CHRIS BOTTONE ON THE NEW KOREAN ANIME:

"THEY'RE JUST STARTING OUT. THEY'LL GET THERE, BECAUSE THEY HAVE THE TECHNICAL ABILITY AND THE ARTISTIC ABILITY."

MAGEDDON was all in mono — but the idea is, in mixing the voices, music, and effects, we make slight alterations. For the most part the music usually suits the film. Not always, but it usually does."

Each film is sent from Japan with a script that has been translated. These scripts are then adapted by someone at ZRO Limits, who in turn is credited on the video. Actors are cast and directed. The two films share little in common except for a few vocal cast members such as Richard Hayworth, Mona Marshall, David Lucas, and Gil Starberry.

These releases mark the dawn of a new age for Korean animation. Bottone predicts that the Koreans will "go from strength to strength. They are both good-quality movies. The animation is not poor by any stretch of the imagination, so I can't see why they won't [pursue future projects]. It's always a question of money and ideas. I'm sure there's money floating around, and I'm positive there are ideas, because in film there are tons of ideas floating around. There's always someone with an idea. I think they will do pretty much as they have done in the past in getting the stuff out there to people."

AFQ



Patriarch, benefactor, counterfeiter. A fawning, public portrait of RED HAWK's evil Lord Seobong, martial-arts head of the Camelia Blossoms gang.

notes Bottone. "Not within a film, but obviously with the storyline. If you are offering an interpretation of a storyline that's already written, you've got to stick to it. GHOST IN THE SHELL, AKIRA, and other such classics all come from comic books. As far as I know, that isn't the case with RED HAWK and ARMAGEDDON and whatever else [the Koreans] are doing."

"I think [both films] are very good examples of Korean animation. I think they stand alone without necessarily any history the size and width of Japan's manga and anime history. You can still watch them and enjoy them as films."

Bottone's primary function at Manga is to act as coordinator. As the physical materials come in, he has them quality checked, because the company does not always know what source they are coming from. Transfers are made from videotapes, not film, even though the original productions were shot on celluloid.

Once Bottone has made sure everything is of an acceptable standard, he sends VHS copies to the various dubbing facilities Manga

Twarn't meteors that killed the dinosaurs; it was this guy. Imperious evil from ARMAGEDDON, ranging from the dawn of man to the end of the world.



*The enemy is strong...
The situation is desperate...
Only one man can save us now:*

THE IRRESPONSIBLE CAPTAIN TYLOR

(Uhh... Is it too late to surrender?)

In the distant future, the fate of humanity dangles precariously. The alien Raalgon Empire, believing that agents of the United Planets Space Force have murdered their beloved emperor, are massing their forces for war. Although the UPSF had nothing to do with the emperor's death, Earth command is just itching for a good battle. However, since UPSF ranks are a little thin, a huge recruitment drive is on.

Into the middle of all of this steps 20-year-old Justy Ueki Tylor, a smooth-talking slacker who decides to enlist, hoping to enjoy an uneventful military career, followed by retirement on a good pension. Everyone in the UPSF sees Tylor as a buffoon, but there's a war on, so he's in. Due to an unexpected (and most likely accidental) act of heroism, he's soon promoted to the rank of lieutenant commander. Tylor is given command of the Soyokaze ("Gentle Breeze"), a broken-down destroyer that serves as a dumping ground for misfits and wash-outs, and goes through captains like a sumo wrestler plows through an all-you-can-eat sushi bar. Through a series of improbable accidents and bizarre circumstances, Tylor and his crew will not only save the day and win the war, but prove themselves to be much, much more than the losers everyone assumes they are.

THE IRRESPONSIBLE CAPTAIN TYLOR is a 26-part, half-hour animated series that aired on Japanese television from January to July 1993.

Based on the books by Hitoshi Yoshioka, the series has also inspired several OVA follow-ups and music videos. Now, the Right Stuf International has released the officially licensed, subtitled version of the original series for U.S. audiences, with an English-dubbed version on tap for early 1999.

"It's a genuinely amusing series, which also happens to have a fairly interesting, fairly serious space opera attached to it," said Neil Nadelman, translator for the subti-

tled CAPTAIN TYLOR episodes. One of the keys to the series' success is its deft blend of comedy and drama, raising the show above the level of an AIRPLANE! or a SPACEBALLS. Observed Nadelman, "If it was just the wacky adventures of Tylor all the time, the audience would probably get bored with it fairly quickly. In any other series, this would be a deadly serious story as two large, inter-stellar empires are about to declare war on each other — with probably lots of people getting hurt in the process. Yet, Tylor is just this sort of wacky character wandering around in there, sort of defying all the odds and saving the day when nobody believes that anybody can do that. Initially, he's presented almost as an Inspector Clouseau-like character, but you get clues as the show goes on that he's more

LEFT: There's something about a slacker. Almost despite themselves, the women of THE IRRESPONSIBLE CAPTAIN TYLOR find themselves attracted to a man whose military goals amount to retirement with a healthy pension.

than what he seems to be. We find out, by the end of the series, that what we *thought* was him being incompetent and irresponsible was just him doing things his way."

For a comedy series, TYLOR does, in fact, have a large cast of well-developed characters who are as interesting as they are varied. Justy Ueki Tylor gives us a major clue to his personality with his name alone (think "Just-y Awake-y"). He's



by DAN
CZIRAKY

WHAT, ME WARRIOR? Captain Tylor (right, flanked by Yoriko Star and Makoto Yamamoto) demonstrates a time-honored military tactic. **BELOW:** Raalgon Captain Ru Baruba Dom (left) and Empress Azalyn (right). **LOWER RIGHT:** You can dress him up, but you can't take him into outer space. Justy Ueki Tylor finds himself elevated to a position of responsibility far beyond his natural instincts. Or is it?



an enigma wrapped in a mystery, but he's too busy trying to have fun to clue us in. Then there are his UPSF comrades. Sub-lieutenant Makoto Yamamoto, a 25-year-old military hard-liner dedicated to duty and honor, is Tylor's first officer. Nineteen-year-old Yoriko Star is a pretty girl to whom Tylor is instantly attracted, but this lieutenant commander/intelligence officer is rigidly obsessed with military regulations and proper comportment. These two are at first outraged by Tylor's bizarre antics, but eventu-

ally come to understand and respect him.

The ship's medical officer, Dr. Kitaguchi, operates at peak efficiency only when he's drunk, and often shares his saki with Tylor. Vain and pretty Lt. Kyung-Hwa Kim is the communications officer; blond, blue-eyed, stoic Lt. Harold Katori is the helmsman. Second Lt. Kojiro Sakei is pilot of the ship's Ranpu space fighter, an ace flyer with a pathological fear of women. The contingent of Marines — a motley crew led by the tough, stoic Lt. Andressen and battle-

crazed, Mohawked Master Sgt. Cryburn — include the mountainous Emperor, party-animal Charley, and the hockey-masked, chainsaw-toting Jason. (Did somebody mention subtlety?)

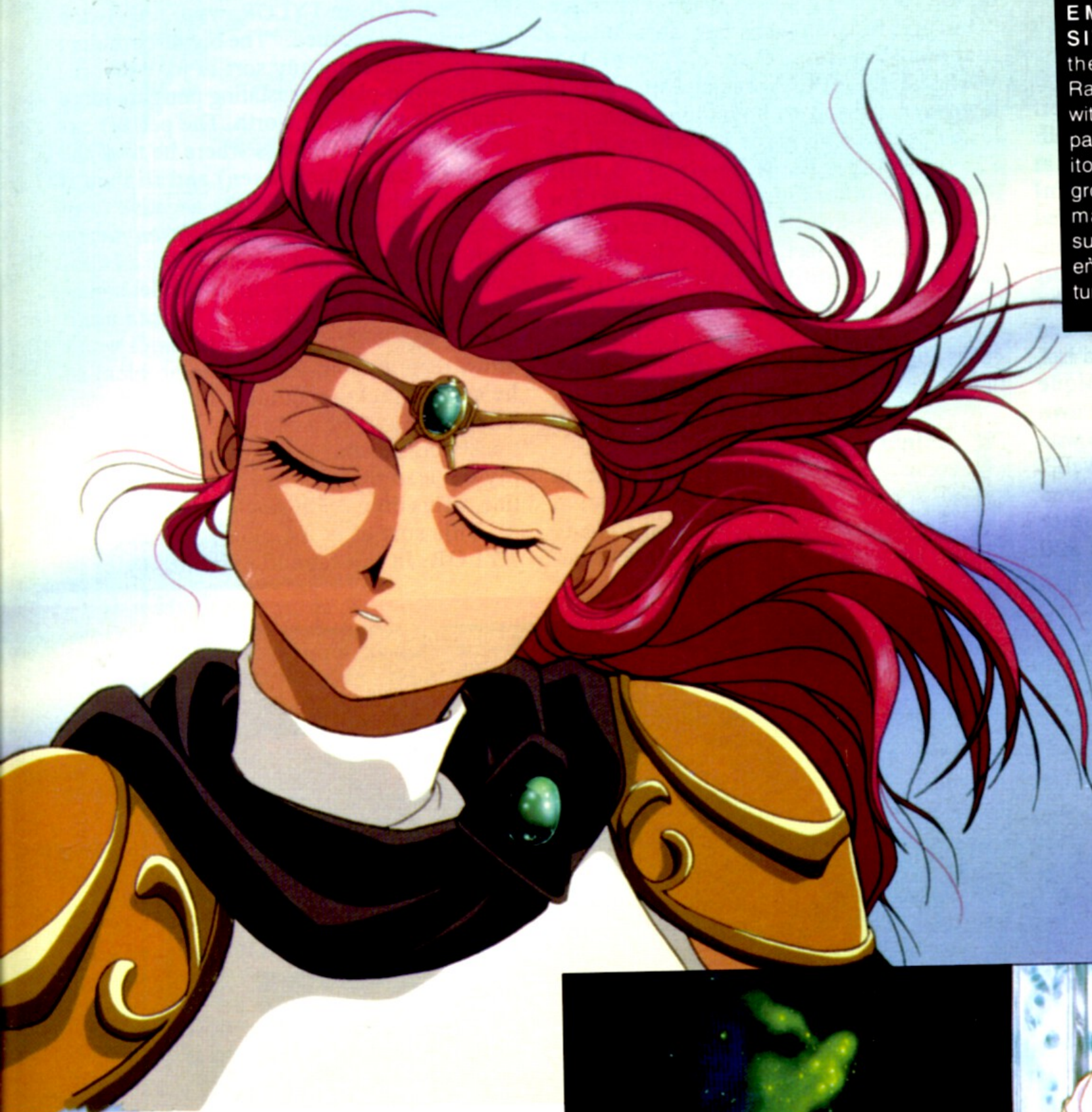
Also on board are 16-year-old twins Emi and Umi Hanner, the daughters of Retired Admiral Robert J. Hanner, who becomes Tylor's mentor. Young, innocent, and eager, the twins join the crew as Tylor's "aides," but soon exhibit a natural talent for flying the Soyokaze's two Shinryu-class fighters, and begin training under Kojiro. Pulling the strings back at UPSF headquarters are Vice Admiral Mifune, a seasoned space warrior concerned with his honor, and Chief of Staff Fuji, a conniving, scheming, power-hungry politician. Both men believe that giving Tylor command of the Soyokaze will either get him killed, or keep him out of the way while others do the real fighting in the war with the Raalgons.

Speaking of our pointy-eared alien adversaries, they quickly figure prominently in the lives of Tylor and his crew. Chief among them is the new empress, Azalyn, Goza the 16th. She is being manipulated into the war with the UPSF by Prime Minister Wang. The true assassin of Azalyn's father, Wang is scheming to use the young empress to further his own designs to eventually take over the empire. Opposing Wang are Captain Ru Baruba Dom, an honorable officer who soon comes to believe that Tylor is a formidable enemy and brilliant strategist, and Admiral Lonawer, a veteran warrior who suspects Wang's true plans. Dom's first officer, the beautiful and deadly Shia Haas, sends the female assassin android, Harumi, to gather information on Tylor. She infiltrates the Soyokaze as the new assistant medical officer, and instantly catches the eye of every male crewmember, including Tylor. Harumi is at first perplexed by Tylor, but soon, even she is charmed by his idiosyncrasies. Confused by her own developing emotions, Harumi eventually becomes one of Tylor's strongest allies. It is the complex relationships between all of these characters, and their own, individual reactions to Tylor, that gives this series its added depth and impact.

CAPTAIN JUSTY UEKI TYLOR: He says he joined the United Planets Space Force to live the soft life. His first instinct in the thick of battle is to surrender. But is Captain Tylor's meteoric rise through the ranks result of dumb luck — doing the wrong thing at the right time — or does the man know more about human nature and the politics of war than even the most seasoned commander?



As anime continues to grow in popularity in the U.S., audiences are beginning to accept a vast amount of diverse product.



EMPRESS AZALYN, GOZA THE SIXTEENTH: The assassination of her father has elevated her prematurely to the Raalgon throne and flung her planet into war with the United Planets Space Force. Unprepared for the demands of rule and the duplicitous politics that surround her, Azalyn will grow to her responsibilities with the help of a man who her advisors tell her is Earth's supreme, military strategist, yet whose presence offers startling paradoxes in human nature: Justy Ueki Tylor.

"Anime is a medium, not a genre," commented Nadelman, who's currently at work on the translations for the subtitled versions of Pioneer's **DRAGONBALL Z** movies and Bandai's **MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM**. "There are many genres within anime, from space operas to cute animal stuff to rather violent horror. In the five years before it [was brought] over here, TYLOR was looked at as being a fairly remarkable show, in that it had very high-quality animation and artwork, and very well-written, appealing characters. It's very interesting, but Tylor is one of the best examples of what you'd call a pure individualist. Considering that Japan is a country known for being a rather conformist society, he's a very unusual character to show up in their pop culture. [The series] isn't, say, **RANMA**-popular. But at the same time, TYLOR doesn't have a huge marketing machine behind it, with a

CAPTAIN RU BARUBA DOM: Devoted to service to his Empress and his planet, he comes to believe that those calling for war against the United Planets Space Force may be doing so for their own, personal ends.



comic series and lots and lots of other videos. Still, people wondered why it hadn't been brought over yet."

The release of the subtitled episodes was a labor of love for both Nadelman and Jeff Thompson, production coordinator for *THE IRRESPONSIBLE CAPTAIN TYLOR* at The Right Stuf. "It's such a wonderful show," Thompson beamed. "I really wanted *everyone* to see TYLOR. In my opinion, once you see one episode, even if it's out of sequence, you're probably going to be hooked." An enormous anime buff who can rattle off obscure trivia at the drop of a hat, Thompson came up with a rather unique idea to draw in fans who might already own fan-produced copies of TYLOR. "I was *completely* confident that it would do well," he said. "The way in which I had conceived the marketing initially seems to be pretty much exactly right, specifically the \$20 price-point. I was very excited to do that. One of the reasons TYLOR is so popular [in the U.S.] is that it's been fan-subtitled for so many years. I felt, why would somebody buy my tape, rather than buying the fan-sub? Naturally, the fan-sub will no longer be available because, by and large, most fan-subbers are a pretty ethical bunch. When a show becomes announced [as having a U.S. distributor], they pull it; they stop making it. But, let's say you didn't go through a fan group directly, but through an intermediary who charged you money for your fan-sub. Why would you *again* buy this show? Well, it'll make you feel better, because you're buying a *licensed* product, but I really wanted to give someone more, kind of give back a little bit. I came up with this idea that, within a certain period of time right after the release of the first tape, if you sent us your fan-sub — it had to have at least one episode of CAPTAIN TYLOR on it — we'd send you the first volume — which is four episodes! — for ten bucks. You had to send us your fan-sub, and we would destroy it. I think this is the proper signal to send. You're acknowledging that fan-subbers are, in fact, a way of life that is certainly not going to go away, and some people might have actually spent money to do this. We got a pretty surprising amount of responses, more than I had expected. We may do it again, when the dubs come out, because it was so successful."

Thompson also decided that the \$19.99 retail price for each volume — four episodes on the first two volumes, three episodes

on the remaining six — was a necessity. "Our previous releases had all been in a reasonable range. Our release of *TOWARD THE TERRA* was at \$30, because it was more than two hours long. Other releases that we've made have been in the \$25-\$30 range. We were always a little lower than other anime distributors. For TYLOR, we could have just as easily charged \$25. In fact, if we'd released it at \$25, people would've called us heroes. Quite frankly, that wasn't enough. I really wanted *everyone* to see TYLOR. It's a great show, and everyone needs to know that, in my opinion."

It might reasonably be assumed that a comedy such as TYLOR would present all sorts of challenges for a translator. However, Nadelman said that comedy truly is a universal language. "Sense of hu-

mor, especially in TYLOR, wasn't really the problem," he recalled. "The biggest problem is with translating any sort of joke that involves word-play. Translating puns are more trouble than they're worth. The perfect example with TYLOR was where he took the word for demotion (*sasen*) and flipped it around, and it sounds like the negative form of the verb 'to let' (*saseru*). "*Sasen* means both 'to demote,' and it sounds like a colloquial way of saying *saseni*, to not let someone do something. He says, '*Sasen nado sasen*,' which literally translates as, 'I won't allow them to demote us!' The problem is, he's also cracking an incredibly bad pun. That's the sort of problem you have with translating humor." As a fix, Nadelman simply devised his own bad pun, making the line, "This drop ... I'll stop!"

This sort of word-play is common in TYLOR. In the second episode, Tylor is

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER YURIKO STAR: Obsessively committed to the strictures of military protocol, she considers her assignment to the Soyokaze as a personal challenge; it's a matter of honor to her that the crew of the most disreputable ship in the fleet be redeemed, and its irresponsible captain be raised to an understanding of the seriousness of command.





SUB LIEUTENANT MAKOTO YAMAMOTO: More than a little smug about the nobility of warfare, he has his life philosophy confounded by service under a captain whose every action flies against the image of the noble warrior.

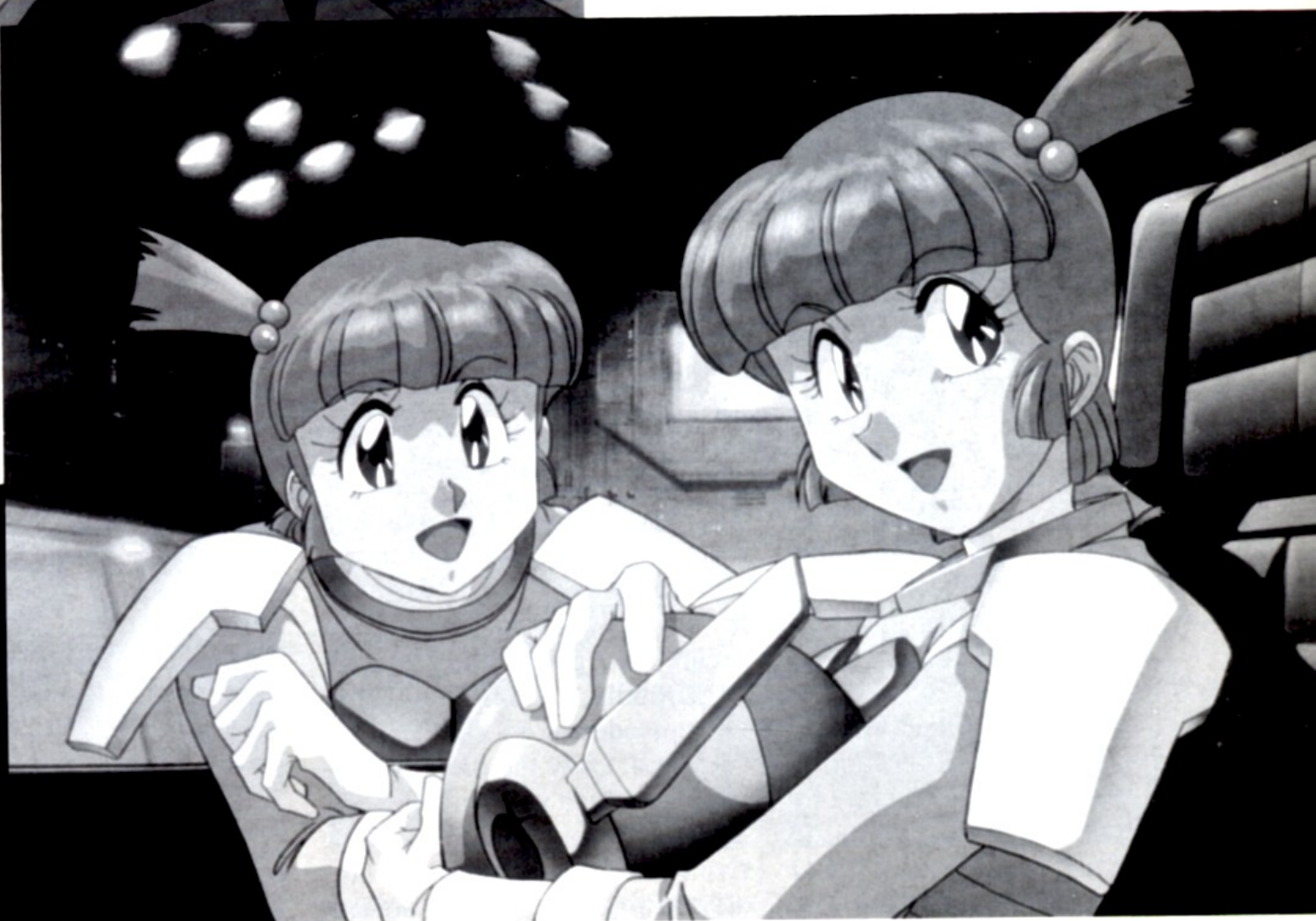
translation. Over the course of the series, Nadelman wrestled with these bizarre language problems to the best of his abilities, often consulting many other translators and scholars of Japanese language. The preview for episode 12 includes a reference to dolphins impersonating beautiful girls on the night of the full moon that still has him stumped.

While neither a spoof nor a parody of space operas, TYLOR does liberally borrow or poke fun at other SF series. The Soyokaze has both phasers and photon torpedoes, and its shuttle is the Galileo. An assassin hired to kill Tylor dresses just like

playing a game of 3-D *shogi* (Japanese chess) with a chief petty officer in the UPSF Pension Department, and tells him in Japanese, "Your talent is always knowing what to say; when it comes to cars, always buy domestic." The "cars" comment is a fairly common Japanese joke, but it loses a lot in translation, doesn't it? Nadelman substituted his own variation on a popular U.S. advertising campaign, and came up with, "You're a sharp guy, and from sharp minds

EMI AND UMI HANNER (right): Daughters of the respected Admiral Robert J. Hanner, they accompany Captain Tylor when he receives his commission to the Soyokaze, and soon discover their own, natural aptitude at piloting Shinryu-class fighters.

MASTER SERGEANT M. CRYBURN AND FIRST LIEUTENANT K.B. ANDERSON (below, left and right): Leaders of the Soyokaze's Marine contingent, they traditionally show their disrespect for authority by leaving booby-trapped "welcome" presents for new commanders.



come sharp ideas!"

Some of the jokes are very subtle, and are addressed in the liner notes provided with the eight-tape boxed set. For instance, Dr. Kitaguchi's favorite brand of sake is *Kin no Tama*, or "Golden Jewel." However, Kintama is also a Japanese word for testicles, making "Golden (Family) Jewels" a more accurate, if amusingly raunchy,

Captain Harlock. In episode ten, Kojiro turns off his targeting computer before making an important shot in his fighter, just like a certain farmboy in a movie set "a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away." The drop suits worn by Sgt. Cryburn and his Marines are right out of the book *Starship Troopers*, and are called (get ready for another bad pun) "Type 95 Hand-to-Hand Combat Suits," code-named "M.C. Hammers" (groan!). There is also a rather oblique reference to 1987's *INNERSPACE*, and Nadelman himself inserted a line that winks at *BABYLON 5*.

The original CAPTAIN TYLOR series was followed by several OVA's in Japan. TYLOR'S WAR was a two-parter, followed by the six-part TYLOR OVA series. The two-part END OF TYLOR came out just two years ago. "We are aware of them,"

Continued on page 30

THE IRRESPONSIBLE CAPTAIN TYLOR

THE RIGHT STUF INTERNATIONAL

How the search for a little, lost robot turned into a gateway to anime's past and future.

by JUDD
HOLLANDER &
SUE
FEINBERG

It was their inability to locate a flying robot boy that gave Shawne P. Kleckner and his partner Robert T. Ferson the idea to start their own company. That was 11 years ago and today that company, The Right Stuf International, Inc. (TRSI) has grown to encompass dozens of anime titles, including their latest — THE IRRESPONSIBLE CAPTAIN TYLOR.

"[TRSI] was formed in 1987 to exploit ASTRO BOY, a program which was licensed by myself and my partner," noted Right Stuf President & CEO Kleckner. "That show was not available and the company was basically formed just to do that."

ASTRO BOY — which was created by Japanese animator Osamu Tezuka — told the story of a young robot and his adventures fighting crime in a futuristic metropolis. The show originally ran in America on NBC-TV in the 1960s, and is considered by many to be the origin of modern, Japanese animation. It seems Ferson (the Right Stuf's Chairman of the Board) was a big fan of ASTRO BOY, and since no one was airing it, Ferson and Kleckner (whose backgrounds were in the computer

industry) decided to acquire the title and market it themselves. "[Ferson] really liked it so we went out and got it," said Kleckner. "[We thought,] *The show wasn't available, why isn't it?* There were a lot of people who wanted to know where it was at [and to see it again]." However, in this case it wasn't enough to secure the rights to the program. Specifically, there were no English episodes of ASTRO BOY to be found. Only the originals existed — which were in Japanese. So began a long period of detective work, with episodes eventually being located from collectors from all over the world, including such places as Zimbabwe, Australia and Tibet. Finally, in late 1989, the first ASTRO BOY tapes were released, and the show was available to US audiences for the first time in 25 years.

Kleckner points out that they were even able to get hold of a "lost" ASTRO BOY episode. It seemed Tezuka destroyed the original tape of this episode because he felt its quality was poor. But as Kleckner noted, "Unfortunately for him and fortunately for us, I guess, the episode in question was one of

the group that was picked up by NBC when the series ran on that network. As a result, the show is available in English, while the Japanese original is no more."

In order to distribute the videos, the two created The Right Stuf Inc., which, according to Kleckner, was just "a name that popped up into my



NEWS FROM THE UNDERGROUND: A strong showing in the bootleg market and a willing Japanese distributor convinced The Right Stuf International to take a gamble on cult hit THE IRRESPONSIBLE CAPTAIN TYLOR.

partner's head, [although] I imagine that he enjoyed that movie. His degree is in astrophysics, so that obviously interested him."

ASTRO BOY proved to be enough of a success that the two began the licensing and distribution of other "Classic Anime" programs of that period, including GIGANTOR and EIGHTH MAN. However, as Kleckner noted, "Over time, obviously there's only a few of those available, [which were originally shown on American television]." As such, if the Right Stuf wanted to stay in business, it had to adapt to the marketplace (TRSI's core audience is 14-35-year-old males) and begin marketing more current anime. In addition to the Classic Anime series, over the years TRSI has acquired Japanese programming from the 1970s through the '90s. The company's first modern anime release was TOWARD THE TERRA, a full-length space opera. There was also Dr. Osamu Tezuka's experimental

consists of only twenty-six 24-minute episodes, as opposed to something like THE SIMPSONS, which is way past its 200th show. Another reason is that many of these shows are simply too Japanese in their style to appeal to American anime audiences without extensive changes, which economically don't make sense.

Jeff Thompson provided an example: "There's a rumor I heard that may be true or it may not be true. A major cable [group] acquired the rights to a children's Japanese TV series, which I personally like a whole lot. Once they saw it, they had absolutely no idea what to do with it. They could never release it, it was just too Japanese. You know: 'Mommy, why are these people eating on the floor?' 'Mommy why are these people sleeping on the floor?' and all that sort of stuff. And it's a kids show, so what are you going to possibly do with that? Well, in fact, you can't really release it. You encounter problems like

have to be cleaned up on every one of those shows." This is one reason why Messrs. Kleckner and Thompson are not very willing to comment on any of the various products TRSI is considering.

Another reason why they keep mum about upcoming projects is because there are numerous licensing and distribution companies out there, all trying to grab a part of the ever-shrinking anime pie. As Kleckner put it, "As more people come into the industry, programming has become that much more expensive. When you have a basket of apples, and everybody wants them, as the [supply] becomes shorter and shorter you pay more for them. Eventually the guy at the end

they are starting to. And that can be a problem when it comes to picking up new product if the fee the owners want becomes too high. One of the problems that we have encountered is that it used to be you could acquire a movie, let's say a big movie, for 'x' dollars. Now, to acquire that same movie, it's probably closer to '3x.' When you look at a new acquisition and see what it cost and you say 'they didn't pay *that!*' Well, in fact, yes they did. Unfortunately this is the way of the world."

That's something Kleckner agreed with. "Well obviously I'm in business to make money like anybody else. I'm not going to buy a program to lose money. At least not on purpose. The key

GRASSROOTS AMNESTY: In a nod to the fans who are the bedrock of the anime industry, The Right Stuf International introduced a unique program whereby fan-subbed copies of THE IRRESPONSIBLE CAPTAIN TYLOR could be exchanged for TRSI's commercially-produced editions.

film LEGEND OF THE FOREST and the recent LEDA: THE FANTASTIC ADVENTURE OF YOHKO, which was released in May of 1997. "We [originally] worked with many of the other venders in the industry at one point to market or assist them in remarketing their titles," said Kleckner. "Only about seven or eight years ago, we started remarketing our own titles." Currently the Right Stuf catalog (produced by the company's Chief Designer Jeff Thompson, an avid anime fan and collector — many of the pictures of anime cells in the TRSI catalog are his) carries titles from all the major (and some not-so-major) distributors.

Be it new material or old, it's not easy providing customers with a steady stream of Japanese animation. And it's getting harder all the time, for a number of reasons. One is that there are not that many episodes of anime titles to begin with. THE IRRESPONSIBLE CAPTAIN TYLOR, for example,

this all the time. People [seem] to want to see giant chrome robots and lion-haired cat-women without much clothes on. That's kind of a shame, but that does seem to be the case a lot of the time."

Another problem with several of the older shows, many of which haven't been seen in America since the 1960s, is the various legal tangles concerning ownership rights. Explained Kleckner, "A lot of this programming has been tied-up with litigation for years due to the fact that a number of these Japanese firms created material in the mid-late '60s and then went out of business. Whenever that happens, you've got rights that are sold off or sent to someplace else. [Also,] Japanese copyright law is a lot different than the law here in the states. It's a convoluted mess and it has been for some time and I think that's why you've not seen [certain] programming. I think eventually you will see that programming, but there's just so many little messes that



who wants the last apple pays the highest price. And that's the way programming is. There's only a finite amount of Japanese [material]. Although they make new programming all the time, there's only so much of it. It is a renewable resource, but it takes time to create new material. [And as that new] programming comes out, you have some programs which are very popular which are going to be really expensive."

Thompson agreed, noting "A lot of companies treated [anime] like it was a bottomless pit. 'Look at all this product, the Japanese have been producing movies for 70 years or more and [look at all the] TV series. We'll never get to the bottom of this.' Well, now

really is to get a program at a price which you feel you can make a little bit on and to keep people happy."

"We really are in a time of transition right now," Thompson pointed out. "We're getting away from this very tiny niche market — [originally] just a few people in the U.S., probably less than 20 or 30 thousand fans — to a point where [now] it's much more mainstream. The awareness, while still not much, is much higher than it has been."

"We've really come a long way since 1991 where Fox News walks into AnimeCon (an animation convention) and picks up a copy of MINNA AGECHAU and says 'So what is Sony doing with this Japanese pornography?'"

AFQ

Thompson confirmed. "We are aware of the music videos, too, which are quite funny. They may be licensed, they may not. It's difficult to predict the future, but, we'll see. I would be very happy to do them. The TY-LOR OVA's will make money, of course, but there are other titles which I also want to see get released, from a historical per-

spective." Thompson was a better prognosticator than he knew; TRSI has since licensed both the OVAs and the music videos for U.S. distribution.

Said Nadelman, "Some fans of Tylor actually complained about the TV series, because it only covered up to about the end of book three or four. There were about sixteen

or eighteen books in Japan, and the last two were actually a new series of stories, set in the same universe, but involving the adventures of Tylor and Yuriko Star's daughter. It was quite a prolific series. They weren't all just about Tylor, either. In those 18 books, maybe 12 were about him, two were about his daughter, and the others were written

about characters like Kojiro, Dom, Yamamoto, and other people. It's entirely possible that they may decide to revive Tylor at some point, especially now that TV series are on the rise and OVA productions are on the decline in Japan."

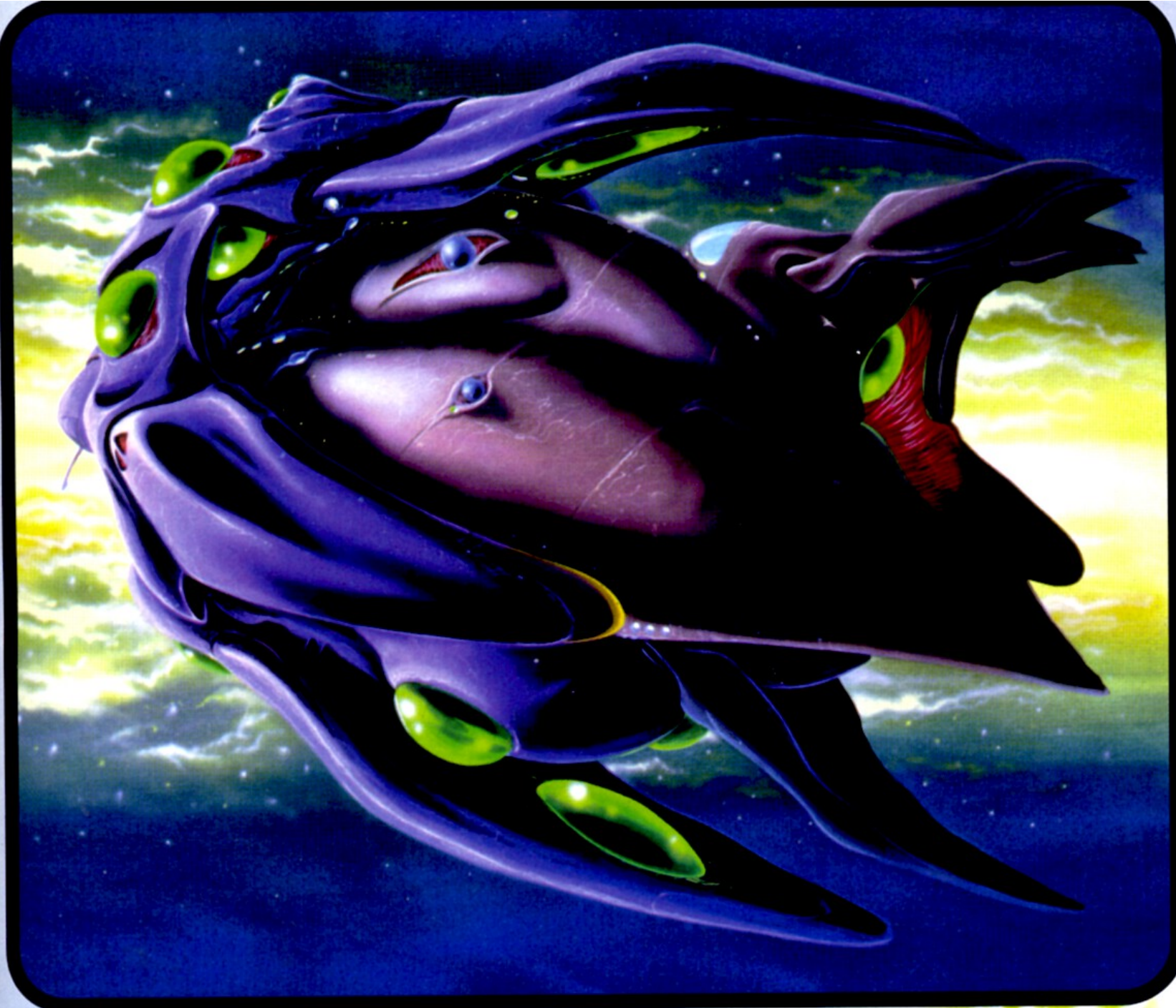
As undeniably entertaining as Right Stuf's subtitled version of TY-LOR is, the company and anime fans



DR. H. KITAGUCHI (above): His ability to work at top proficiency while well-lubricated lends new meaning to the term, "For medical applications only."

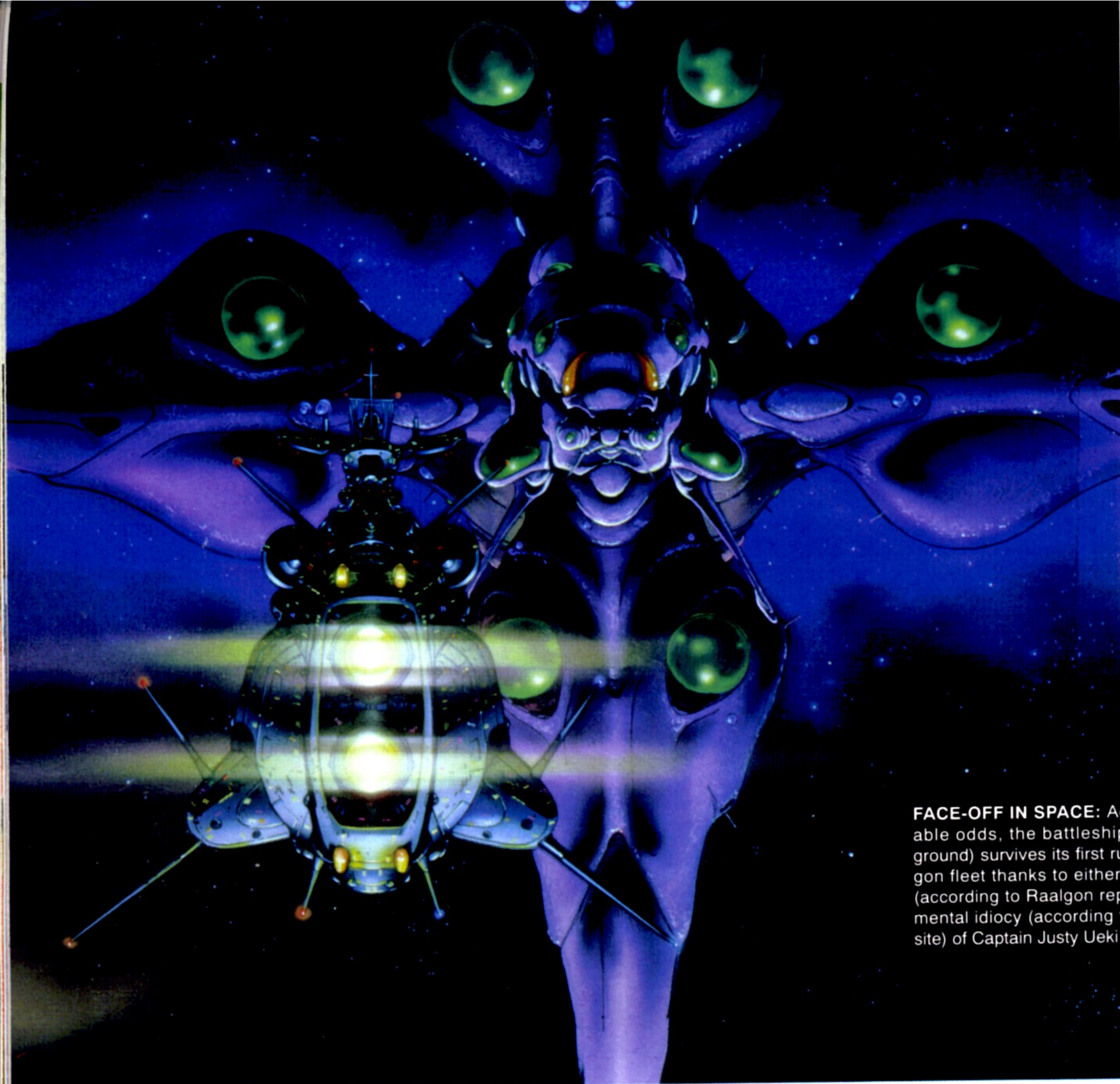
SECOND LIEUTENANT KOJIRO SAKAI (right): The quick-tempered Ranpu fighter pilot divides his time between waging wars on the Raalgon enemy and the Soyokaze's Marines.





PORTRAIT IN TECH: Traditional, nautical design of the United Planets Space Force, as typified by the Soyokaze (below), contrasts distinctly with the Raalgon Empire's more organic look.





the ability to act in front of a microphone — a lot of times without any other actors there. Logistically, it usually winds up that each character is dubbed separately. You try, as a director, to interact with them as much as possible. I'll be on the talk-back mike, trying to act out the scene with them, but that's not as good as if we had everybody there and doing it all together. It winds up being a very small group of people that can really pull it off. From a fi-

FACE-OFF IN SPACE: Against insurmountable odds, the battleship Soyokaze (foreground) survives its first run-in with the Raalgon fleet thanks to either the quick thinking (according to Raalgon reports) or the monumental idiocy (according to witnesses at the site) of Captain Justy Ueki Tylor.

nancial standpoint, you're not always getting everyone who is available, either. You're compet-

are eagerly anticipating the release of the English-dubbed version, beginning with the first, four-episode volume, in early 1999. "TYLOR is definitely different," commented Jim Malone of Taj Productions, director of the dubs. "A lot of times, you have a small amount of main characters, and a lot of different people come through as the series goes on. The casting sessions for this have been pretty extensive, because most of the cast are sticking around. There's a large cast that pretty much plays a role throughout, so you want to make sure that you really get the right people."

Given this premium release, Malone and his associates are paying special attention to the voice-casting of TYLOR. "We always try to remain respectful to the original story, and we always try to make it fit with an American audience as much as possible," the director explained. "You do as much pre-production work as possible, but there's nothing that really takes the place of being

there with the actors and actually recording it. The main thing is to have the characters remain true. With Captain Tylor, the goal is not to make him into something he's not. We try not to make him goofy or obnoxious. That's the biggest trick, and one of the reasons we've been casting so extensively, to really find the right Tylor. Obviously, he's not stupid, and he's not really as slack as he appears. There's a lot of subtlety with it, with a sense of comedic timing. The actor would have to be able to play that range to Captain Tylor."

Malone experienced many of the same troubles in casting TYLOR as he's encountered casting other English-dubbed anime projects. "There's a limited talent pool for this," he said. "You get a combination of voice-over 'actors,' and then you get actors who don't really do a lot of voice-over stuff. Only rarely do you get the combination of an actor who has the qualities of a voice-over person: good microphone technique;

ing with projects that may be more lucrative or more important to them. Most people who do it really enjoy it, because it's so unlike anything else that they do. Even if they're doing new, American cartoons — which are recorded before the animation is done — dubbing is still different, because it's the exact opposite process."

It's just this sort of challenge that not only appeals to actors, but dubbing directors like Malone. "You're always trying to find that perfect combination of the right read while still having it match the lip-flap," he said, referring to the lip movements of the animated characters as they speak. "Personally, I try to pay as much attention to the lip-flap as possible, because I think that when you see that the lip movement is off, it's very distracting to the whole fantasy aspect of it. You're instantly aware that you're watching a cartoon that's been dubbed. But you're constantly in a trade-off situation between acting and realistic lip movement. It's

interesting, because you find it's almost an intuitive thing. People who are good at it are *consistently* good at it. When you look at it one time with a script in front of you, and you see what you're up against, it's not like you want to be thinking too much about it. For any actor, it's a real challenge, and any good actor likes that. The difference between going in and being Robin Williams and just being able to go in and do your thing is just night and day compared to the craft of watching lip movement. Really, you want to *act*, and hope that the script is going to match. We spend a lot of time in pre-production making sure there's not a lot of extra words to it, or too few words, either. There are things that people use, like audio compression and expansion, to try and stretch something that's ending early, or compress something that's running long, but that really has kind of a negative effect on the audio quality. We try to edit as little as possible. That's really the skill of putting these things out."

Malone and Right Stuf are also performing something of a balancing act with the ethnic tone of the TYLOR dubs. "The folks that are doing this *love* the original version, so the goal is to remain faithful to that, but to give it an American appeal, whatever *that* is. They want to appeal to a broad audience, but not at the risk of drastically changing this," Malone explains. Nadelman already tackled the cultural and idiomatic problems with his script for the subtitled version, and feels that the dubs shouldn't have a difficult time staying true to TYLOR.

"You really can't call TYLOR a spoof," the translator concurred, "because then you'd have a lot of obviously ridiculous elements as part of the story. Tylor is a ridiculous element thrown into a fairly serious background, and I think that's part of the appeal. It's a comedy series, but, at the same time, it has excellent space battles, very good political maneuvering in the background — you get that Imperial intrigue with the Raalgons. CAPTAIN TYLOR without Tylor would still be a very interesting world to look at. You'd have that sort of standard space opera that's still interesting enough that, even without focusing on what happens on the Soyokaze, you still have a well-balanced story. For the most part, anything that's written well in

Japanese actually translates fairly well into English. The characters were well-defined, the dialogue was pretty crisp, the jokes were fun and not really cultural. All in all, I think TYLOR is an example of an excellent series to bring over here. Well-written, good artwork, good animation, and nothing that you could really say is at all offensive about it. No graphic violence or explicit sex, not even any foul language, really. It's got mecha, it's got action, it's a comedy, it's a remarkably well-rounded, well-balanced series."

Fan reaction to the long-awaited, licensed release of the CAPTAIN TYLOR series has been quite positive. There were many fan-operated TYLOR websites prior to Right Stuf's release, and the company now operates the official site, www.tylor.com. Perhaps Lorraine

Savage, editor of *The Rose*, summed up the series' appeal best: "Could IRRESPONSIBLE CAPTAIN TYLOR be a complex allegory of man's constant battle with destiny, or is it just a wild romp filled with slapstick, double-crosses, zany crew members, inept government officials, a spunky Empress, and a clueless slob? You decide."

As Japanese animation continues to make huge inroads in American pop culture, THE IRRESPONSIBLE CAPTAIN TYLOR may have just the right combinations of story, art, entertainment value, and fan support to become the next big anime success story. How ironic is it, then, that a series that cracks jokes at the expense of STARBLAZERS and MACROSS PLUS could possibly end up more popular than either predecessor? Don't bother explaining that to Tylor, though — you'd just have to wake him up first.

AFQ



ONE MAN AGAINST THE COSMOS: An innocent in a universe of political double-dealing and interplanetary war, the irresponsible Captain Tylor starts out seeking nothing more than a comfortable life for himself and ends up playing a decisive role in vast, galaxy-spanning drama.

BIBLICAL



REVIEW

Jeffrey Katzenberg made miracles happen at Disney animation.

*Can he part the waters again with
PRINCE OF EGYPT?*

by MIKE
LYONS

THE PRINCE OF EGYPT is that rare commodity: an eagerly awaited, animated feature not produced by Disney. When DreamWorks SKG announced that their first animated project was going to be a re-telling of the Biblical story of Moses, guffaws sounded throughout the industry. Now as the film's December 18th release date draws near and many have had a taste in previews or via trailers, PRINCE looks to be the breakthrough project that many fans of the medium were praying for.

When Jeffrey Katzenberg, one of the pilots of Disney's animation renaissance who later left to form DreamWorks with Steven Spielberg and David Geffen, originally announced the Old Testament tale as project number one, many thought he had spent too much time inhaling around the ink and paint department. Some of these pessimists were actually part of THE PRINCE OF EGYPT team, including Simon Wells, one of the film's three directors. He remembers his first meeting in January of 1995,

when Katzenberg and Spielberg asked him to come aboard. "I was thinking, Do I really want to make this story? Are we going to wind up doing a gentle, animated version of this?"

Wells (AMERICAN TAIL II, WE'RE BACK, BALTO) then recalled a more brutal passage from the Biblical original, in which the Egyptian prince Moses, seeing the persecution of the Hebrew slaves, grows so intensely angered that he kills an Egyptian guard. "My question to Steven and Jeffrey

was, 'Is the guard going to die?'" said Wells. "I thought, 'If Moses does kill the guard, if Moses is going to be a murderer and be responsible for that, then it's going to be a more interesting movie.'"

In THE PRINCE OF EGYPT, the guard does die, the Nile does run red with blood, newborn males are killed, and charioteers are swallowed up by the Red Sea. In fact, none of the story's darker elements have been sanitized in any way. Co-director Brenda Chapman, who came to DreamWorks via Disney's story department, said, "We knew we had to tell all of it."

"We couldn't step away from it. It would have been a disservice to the material," added Steve Hickner, an Amblimation veteran, who co-directs PRINCE OF EGYPT with Wells and Chapman.

Kelly Asbury, who, along with Lorna Cook, serves as head of story for THE PRINCE OF EGYPT, was concerned about how the more brutal elements were going to be dealt with. Those doubts fled when he met with Jeffrey Katzenberg: "He said

BELOW: PRINCE OF EGYPT directors Steve Hickner, Brenda Chapman, and Simon Wells (l to r) with maquette of Moses. **LEFT:** The Man himself, staying true to the original while blazing new trails in animated drama.



to me, 'We're going to push the envelope here. We can't make this movie and be true to it without dealing with the issues that are in it.' There's no way that you can tell this story truthfully without dealing with those issues. We have slavery, we have genocide, we have murder, we have plagues — all of those things are in the movie and all of those things are part of the story of Moses."

PRINCE OF EGYPT opens with an almost eight-minute musical prologue entitled *Deliver Us*, which shows how Moses is set adrift in a basket on the Nile, after the Pharaoh has ordered that each newborn male in the Hebrew slave community must die. The babe is rescued by the Queen, who adopts him and names him Moses.

By setting PRINCE's tone in these first few minutes, the filmmakers knew that this sequence had to reach out and grab the audience immediately. They also knew that this would be the moment people would begin judging the first animated feature of this new studio. "I don't think any other part of the movie got worked over as much and in as much detail," admitted Wells. "It tells you what the movie is going to be like. It's a microcosm of the whole movie."

THE PRINCE OF EGYPT then jumps ahead in time. We are re-introduced to the now 18-year-old Moses and his brother, Ramses, who is next in line to inherit the throne from his father, the Pharaoh Seti. The two have grown up together, in a very close sibling relationship, with Moses unaware of his true heritage. William Salazar, who served as supervising animator for Younger Moses, tried to juxtapose the rambunctious, teenage character against the more stoic Ramses. "Moses knows that he's never going to be the Pharaoh, so he doesn't have to behave a certain way. He's more easy-going."

"He is somebody who is bound by what he believes to be his destiny, when he's raised as an Egyptian," added Asbury. "The Egyptian culture raised him to believe that his destiny was to be a prince of Egypt and it turns out that his destiny is something quite different."

Moses first discovers this when he ventures into Goshen, where the Hebrew slaves live. Here, he happens upon his blood brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam. This inci-

dent awakens new feelings within Moses and he discovers the truth, not only about himself, but also about the brutal power that's been wielded by his fa-



ther, the Pharaoh.

Everything comes to a head in the scene in which Moses kills the guard. Moses finds he can no longer stay in Egypt and flees into the Midean desert. Here, he becomes part of a nomadic tribe, led by a priest named Jethro. "He discovers a new outlook," added Wells. "He's introduced to the idea that life is about not what you build but what you are."

Moses also falls in love with and marries one of Jethro's daughters, Tzipporah. "The first time that they meet, they are really in conflict," said Rodolph Guenoden, supervising animator of Tzipporah. "She really doesn't like him, because he's spoiled. Her people are free to go anywhere, seeing the Hebrews enslaved is really alien to her."

Eventually, Moses is confronted by God, in the form of a burning bush. The Lord gives Moses what seems to be an impossible task: confronting the power of Egypt in order to free the Hebrews from the bondage of slavery.

When Moses returns to Egypt, he finds that his brother Ramses has become the Pharaoh. Ramses, of course, refuses to listen to Moses' plea to free the Hebrews. Plagues are unleashed upon Egypt, made all the more horrific in PRINCE OF EGYPT by the fact that Moses and Ramses still harbor strong brotherly feelings for one another.

"The third act becomes this dichotomy between what Moses has to do and how he really feels about his brother," added Wells. "In turn, it's also about what Ramses feels about Moses and yet what he, by his upbringing and his beliefs, feels that he should do. There's this strain between them, really wanting things to be back the way they were when they were friends."

"We discovered this story of two broth-



A MATCHED SET OF PROPHETS: William Salazar (above) was lead animator on Younger Moses, while Kristof Serrand (left) performed the same duties for the character's older counterpart.

ers," noted Chapman. "You relate to the relationship between Moses and Ramses and how everything that they have to deal with affects their relationship."

The plagues in the story are followed by the death of each first-born male in Egypt, upon which Ramses banishes the Hebrews. It is during this exodus that the filmmakers encountered one of their greatest production challenges: the parting of the Red Sea. Realizing that Cecil B. DeMille's epic visualization of that scene in his classic THE TEN COMMANDMENTS is imbedded so deeply in moviegoers' minds, co-director Hickner knew that it was up to PRINCE OF EGYPT to create a new variation on a familiar theme. "That was the icon of our parents' generation, when the film came out in '56. We knew we had to come up with the icon for our generation."

This idea of re-thinking the usual paradigm became the standard throughout production on PRINCE OF EGYPT. "When we started," remembered Hickner, "we took it down the road of every other animated movie ever made — Moses and Ramses had pet animals, there were humorous sidekicks — everything that you would expect. After our first rough screening, we thought, 'That's just not working in this movie.'"

Brenda Chapman also remembered this time of forcing these ready-for-marketing animation conventions on the film, "We realized that it just didn't fit, so it kept pushing us further and further away from the animated standard." Kelly Asbury recalled an early version that even came complete with an *Under the Sea*-like show-stopper set in the desert. "We, literally, at one point, had dancing scorpions," he laughed.

As it went through revisions, all involved soon realized that the story of Moses was much larger than the archetypes of the medium, especially when Jeffrey Katzen-

Continued on page 39

THE PRINCE OF EGYPT

SPECIAL EFFECTS

The parting of the Red Sea. Just say the words and it conjures images of Charlton Heston parting the waters with the wave of his hand. The men behind the visual effects of **THE PRINCE OF EGYPT** knew that they had to come up with something new. "Instead of a big opening, with everyone running away from soldiers," said Don Paul, co-head of visual effects for the film, "it became this long, six-minute segment, in which the entire Hebrew population enters the sea after it opens and then descends into this other world. It was different. It wasn't just an effect."

Dan Philips, the film's other co-head of effects, added that in order to make the scene even more spectacular, they decided to scale back the effects leading up to it. "You really have to anticipate and bring down your effects before a moment like that, so that you can really savor that moment and so the audience can really appreciate it. If we stacked too much before we did that, I don't think the moment would have been too strong. It's just as important to pull back and anticipate, as it is to deliver the goods."

"This balancing act was throughout the film and even at the Red Sea. Just before we open it, there's the pillar of fire, which is pretty magnificent, too. The hard part was trying to figure out when to open up and when to close down. Because we now have the ability to do anything that we want to do, in terms of visual effects."

With everything from plagues to the Angel of Death, the animators knew they were about embark on a film that would rely heavily on visual effects. "At first, I was worried about the

kind of film that it was," said Paul, "because it was a serious religious epic and you know that the effects themselves have to trigger an emotional response about peoples' spiritual beliefs and the morality of life. The effects have to have some significance to support the story, but also to live up to what people have in their hearts. So, what

CGI, then back to traditional. Many times we wind up with a mixture that isn't one or the other." "There were a lot of little tricks that we found," added Paul, "in terms of bringing drawings into a lot of the design work with the CG. There was a lot of 'back and forth' development of a scene that way. We really tried to do a much more

Richie Chavez and Kathy Altieri to which everything within the film, even large effects sequences, had to adhere. As Philips noted, "With digital effects, you can do anything. The easiest thing to do nowadays is to do complex photo-real surfaces, especially in 3-D. So, the trick we found to blending the technological approach with the traditional is a use of restraint."

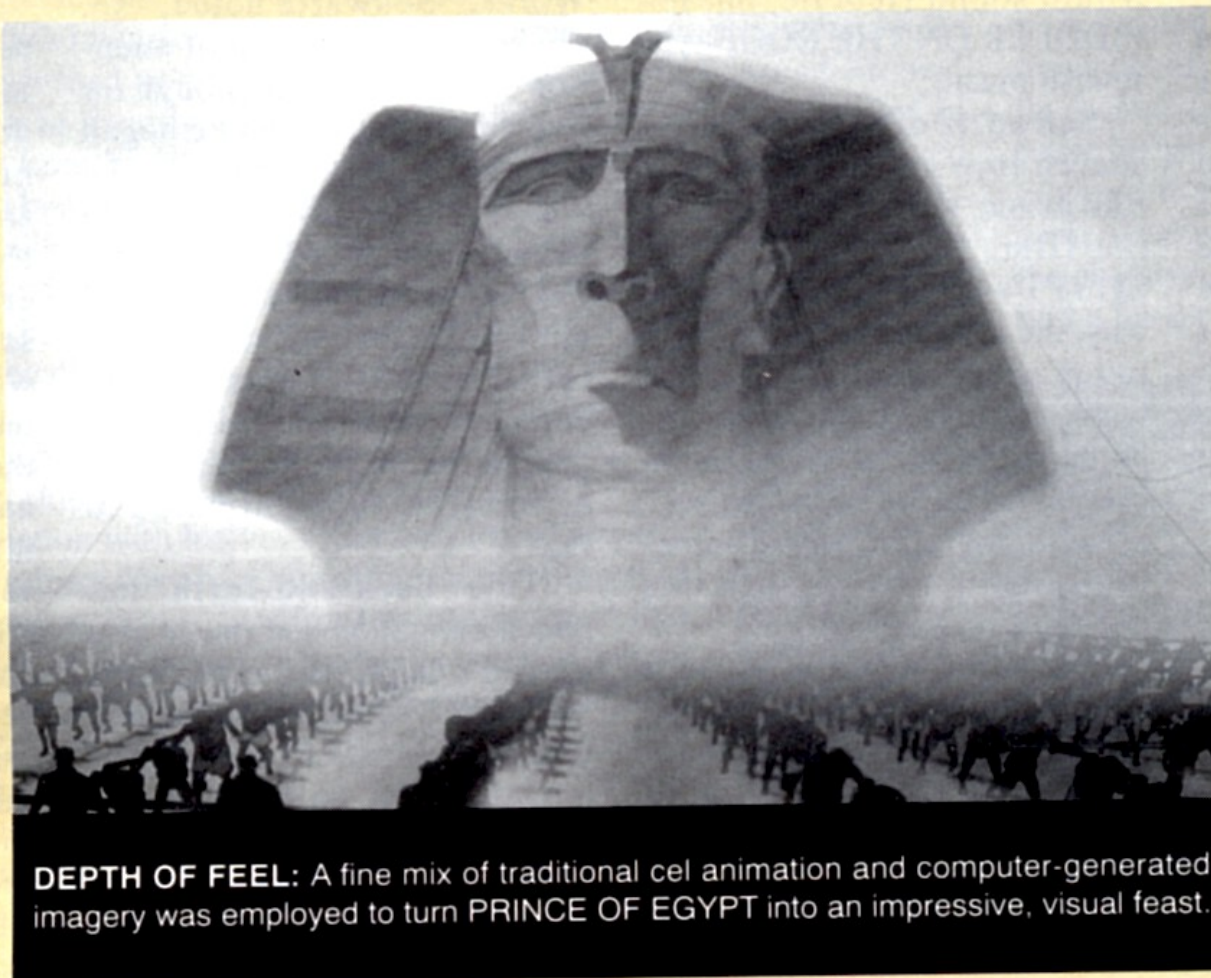
Another of the film's powerful moments, the plague of locusts, grew from the realm of the computer, but before it could become a moment of show-off animation, DreamWorks co-founder, Steven Spielberg, added his input. "Steven Spielberg wanted there to be clouds in the distance," remembered Philips, "and then as the clouds approached camera you would realize that they were millions of locusts."

The effects co-heads also note that in a film like **THE PRINCE OF EGYPT** almost every scene is an effect. The film's effects team was responsible for small touches, such as character lighting during the dynamic

chariot race between Moses and Ramses, and even more dramatic scenes, such as creating distinct members of a massive crowd for the film's exodus finale.

"Every container that has liquid and every little splash is a visual effect that must be drawn," noted Philips, who, along with his partner, said that no matter how impressive the tools behind their effects seem, they are still just a small cog in the more powerful story telling machine. Or, as Paul succinctly stated, "How the tool is used is what has the impact."

AFG
Mike Lyons



DEPTH OF FEEL: A fine mix of traditional cel animation and computer-generated imagery was employed to turn **PRINCE OF EGYPT** into an impressive, visual feast.

we're bringing to this is something that people can respond to emotionally and spiritually."

One of the challenges within that mandate was the scene featuring the burning bush. After all, how do you animate the voice of God? "We found out, very early on, it had to feel like fire, but really not be fire," noted Philips. "It couldn't act like traditional fire, otherwise it wouldn't actually work."

Both Philips and Paul decided not to rely heavily on the computer generated imagery (CGI) common in many recent animated efforts. "Our development process here really does go back and forth," admitted Philips. "It's traditional, then

collaborative development process with those shots."

As example, Philips points to the Red Sea sequence: "There's one scene, where the water splashes Ramses onto a rock. We did a computer particle splash and it just looked too synthetic, but then we used those particles to trigger some drawings and it works really well, because you get the dynamic quality of the 3-D [computer imagery] along with the artistic quality of the drawn splashes."

This intermingling of techniques grew from the stylized look of the film, a design created by production designer Darek Gogol and art directors

THE PRINCE OF EGYPT

SONGWRITER

STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

Stephen Schwartz is on a quest for immortality. After writing songs for Disney's *POCAHONTAS* and *THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME*, and now for DreamWorks' *THE PRINCE OF EGYPT*, Schwartz said it's strange to think that, just as today's generation still knows the words to musical numbers from such classics as *SNOW WHITE* and *PINOCCHIO*, decades from now new generations will be memorizing his work. "It's really indescribable. It has to do with the large preponderance of kids in the audience. These are often the first films that kids see and certainly among the first soundtracks that kids listen to. It stays with them their whole life. That's just an amazing feeling for a writer to know that you are a part of that."

The Grammy and Oscar winning musician was born in New York City, where he later studied piano at the Juilliard School of Music and went on to graduate from Carnegie Mellon University. He made a name for himself on Broadway, writing the music and lyrics for such hit shows as *GODSPELL* and *PIP-PIN*.

In 1995, he collaborated with Disney regular Alan Menken on *POCAHONTAS*. Delving for the first time into animation, Schwartz said he soon found a large distinction between the Great White Way and the ink-and-paint department. "In a stage musical, one of the most effective moments you can have is when a really fine singer stands in the center of the stage, by his or herself, singing for three or four minutes. That can be one of the best things in the show. You can't get away with that in film. My stock line is, 'If you're going to write a ballad for a feature, the singer better be going over a waterfall in a canoe!'"

For *THE PRINCE OF EGYPT*, Schwartz was called upon to craft both lyrics and music for the film's six songs, which he says were "more about trying to find a sound that would be accessible to American audiences, but would still immediately suggest the film's geographical location, clearly that it would sound Egyptian, that it would sound Hebraic, but not *FIDDLER ON THE ROOF*-type Jewish music."

Schwartz did extensive research into ancient Egyptian folk music, to find the sound for the film. Once *PRINCE OF EGYPT*'s production got underway, the songwriter found inspiration everywhere. "One of the really enjoyable things about the animation process is the collaborations with the visual artists," noted Schwartz. "That's something that's particular to this medium."

This collaborative spirit helped Schwartz over some major hurdles. The first of these began with the film's opening number, *Deliver Us*. At almost eight minutes, the film's prologue may be one of the longest musical numbers ever written for the screen. The song and scene encompass the film's back

story: the setting of Egypt, what conditions are like for the Hebrew slaves, and most importantly, the introduction of the baby Moses, as he's put in a basket by his mother and sent down the Nile.

"It is the very first thing that people are going to hear and see when they come to the very first animated feature from DreamWorks," Schwartz noted, "so, obviously we put a lot of attention on it." The breakthrough for Schwartz came when he began working with the artists. "The whole center section of that sequence, which is the trip down the Nile, was basically worked out by the story artists first and then I wrote the music to accompany what was going to be happening on the screen. Then ultimately, they animated to that."

This "back-and-forth" between animation and music also played a large role in the song *Through Heaven's Eyes*, which is sung to Moses by the character Jethro, the chief of the nomadic tribe with whom Moses finds refuge. "That's the third song that was written for that scene," said Schwartz. "The first two songs that I wrote for it were actually pretty good songs,

but as the character of Jethro developed and we became clearer about what needed to be accomplished, the context of the song changed and became more demanding and more philosophical. Ultimately, *Through Heaven's Eyes* was partly inspired by one of the directors, Steve Hickner, who basically came up with the idea behind it."

For Schwartz, however, nothing was more difficult during *PRINCE OF EGYPT*'s production than the song that was never written. "I felt strongly, and frankly still do to some extent, that since this was a brothers' story, there ought to be a song for the two brothers somewhere toward the beginning of the film," said the songwriter. "I thought it should be the second number of the film. I took about three or four passes at it and for various reasons none of them really did what we need them to do. So, I never found it."

THE PRINCE OF EGYPT continues a prolific time for the animated musical, one that shows no sign of stopping. But it raises a question: why haven't live-action musicals had their comeback? "Musicals require a suspension of disbelief," said Schwartz. "When someone bursts into song, you have to suspend your disbelief that they're doing that. Therefore, musicals need to occur in a somewhat artificial environment. Animation, obviously, is an artificial medium. They're drawings and we know that they're drawings. So, it's much easier for drawn characters to burst into song, without the audience 'falling' out of the movie. My hope is that as people get more used to musicals on screen through animation, that there will be a comeback of live-action musicals." When that happens, it will no doubt continue Stephen Schwartz' quest for immortality.

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FILIAL CONFLICT: The relationship between brothers Moses and Ramses is central to *PRINCE OF EGYPT*'s drama, yet songwriter Stephen Schwartz regretted that the film offered no song to highlight the conflict.



berg delivered his brief on the path that the film should follow. "He wanted it to be drawn by Gustaf Dore, painted by Claude Monet and shot by David Lean," Wells reiterated. "I thought, 'Can you set the bar any higher?'"

This inspired a distinct look for the film, heavily influenced by a pre-production trip to Egypt and realized by an Egyptian artwork style from art directors Richie Chavez and Kathy Altieri, as well as production designer Darek Gogel.

With the design in place, story questions still remained, the largest of which was how to handle the religious subject matter. DreamWorks brought in over 300 religious leaders from around the world to review the script. Co-director Chapman admitted to an initial hesitation to these meetings. "There are so many agendas and different contradicting beliefs. But, in the end, it was actually very helpful. They really informed our decisions. They taught us the intent of some of the things that we had misunderstood."

Ironically, one such misunderstanding revolved around the much-discussed scene in which Moses kills the guard. In the original story, Moses' actions come from his witnessing a slave being beaten, but the filmmakers behind *PRINCE OF EGYPT* thought they would "heighten" the drama of the scene by replacing the unknown slave with Moses' sister Miriam. Recalled Chapman, "A group of rabbis said, 'No, you've missed the point entirely. The whole point is that Moses didn't know who this Hebrew was. This stranger is his connection with his people. He finally feels something for another human being, even a stranger.'"

Having this large enclave of advisors was an attempt to ward off criticism, but Hickner knew that there would be plenty of attackers waiting to pounce on the story (the film has already mockingly been dubbed "THE ZION KING"). "I'm sure that people are going to say that we sold out. But, I

think it's similar to bringing in military leaders to consult on *SAVING PRIVATE RYAN*."

And so the elements of this ancient, powerful story and the whims of animation began to bend toward one another. "There is a saying that has prevailed over the years," Asbury noted. "I use it all the time: 'Trust the process.'"

Through this process, the various elements of *PRINCE OF EGYPT* started to "click" into place. First and foremost came the task of stripping away some of the icon that surrounds Moses and finding the character within. "If you look at Moses at the end of the film, it's a very different character than the beginning, yet he's the same," noted Young Moses' supervising animator Salazar. "Younger Moses is the prince of the palace, he's joyful, full of energy, no problems. His only concern is to enjoy his prince-like life."

For Kristof Serrand, supervising animator for Adult Moses, the hurdles were a little higher. Unlike the earlier years of Moses' life, it is the older Moses that is detailed in the Bible and surrounded with preconceived notions. For the animator, this meant blocking out the character's most easily identifiable Hollywood persona. "I tried not to look at Charlton Heston's performance," noted Serrand. "When I did look at his performance, it was to try and avoid doing the same thing."

Serrand found himself digging deeper than just film for inspiration. "The challenge was to make him believable and alive," he said. "In every scene, I was thinking, 'What would an average person do when put into this kind of situation?' Or, 'How

would I react?' This is kind of difficult when you think of meeting God. You can't really rely on your own experiences."

Moses' brother, Ramses, began to fit into *PRINCE OF EGYPT*'s new animation mold. Thanks to the character's vocal counterpart, actor Ralph Fiennes, Ramses is no mere cackling bad guy. "You get the anger and the hard edge in his voice," noted Chapman, "but you'd also hear this vulnerability and it really pushed us into a direction where we realized that there was so much to this character. You didn't agree with him, but you could sympathize and you really understood where he was coming from."

In addition to Fiennes, *PRINCE OF EGYPT* features a large, recognizable roster of voice actors. "One of the things about movie stars is that they're really good actors, that's why they're movie stars," said Wells.

Val Kilmer takes on the film's lead, speaking for Moses, in a challenging role that required him to age several decades and also translate the character's transformation simply in his voice. "I think when Val started the movie, he thought it was going to be just a little animated picture and he was doing it because he has kids," noted Wells. "Then he discovered that this was an opportunity to do some serious acting." Kilmer submerged into the character so deeply that Chapman said she had a hard time distinguishing between the



UNDISCOVERED BROTHERS: A chariot race between Moses and sibling/soon-to-be-Pharaoh Ramses bumps up the action quotient and introduces audiences to a human aspect of the story ignored in previous recountings.



actor and the drawings. "He is Moses," she laughed. "Now, when I see him in a movie, it doesn't sound right. That's not the right face for that voice."

For the role of Moses' Hebrew brother, Aaron, Jeff Goldblum fleshed-out what, in the story stages, had been a one-note character. In fact, as Wells recalled, the actor refused to let the character go until he got it just right. "He's indefatigable. He will actually carry on until you switch the microphone off and force him out the door. We had a session where we literally had two lines to record and Jeff did 120 takes on one line!"

The powerhouse cast also includes Michelle Pfeiffer as Tziporah. "She had spontaneity in front of the microphone," said animator Gue-noden. "She would get into her lines immediately, which is something I tried to pick up on for the character."

PRINCE OF EGYPT also features Sandra Bullock as Miriam, Danny Glover as Jethro, Patrick Stewart as Pharaoh Seti, Helen Mirren as the Queen and Steve Martin and Martin Short as the comical court magicians Hotep and Huy, re-

SCOPING THE SCENERY: Co-art directors Kathy Altieri (right) and Richie Chavez (far right) helped create an ancient Egypt as striking as any ever committed to film (above).



spectively.

The comedians recorded their sessions together, adding a level of ad-libbing to the proceedings that was both help and hindrance to Patrick Mate, who served as supervising animator for both characters. "I did a few scenes where the animation got cut, because some of the lines were too contemporary," said Mate. "They gave us some great stuff that we were just loathe to cut," added Chapman. "But, we knew we had to be true to what this film is doing."

The fast-paced one-liners (*a la* Robin Williams' Genie in *ALADDIN*) from Short and Martin were serving as a distraction, so instead, animator Mate took a different approach, casting the characters as, "a bit sinister and a bit ridiculous, with very realistic movements, but choreographed at the same time."

Mate was given some free reign when designing the look of the characters, crafting comical, geometric shapes in the duo's actual appearances — Hotep is squat and round, Huy is thin and linear. "They are a bell and a candle, basically," laughed Mate. "For movement, I thought of the mushrooms in *FANTASIA*. When they walk, you didn't see their feet. I played off that for Hotep and for Huy, I



"For the first time in an animated movie, a character will act with silence," said Rodolph Guenoden, adding, "The acting had to be realistic without any live-action reference. It had to come from inside the character. We had to make the audience believe that the character was actually thinking."

"The acting is a lot different from what I've seen on other features," added Mate. "When you work in animation, the director is always worried about the acting in a close up. They sometimes think that you can't get that across in animation. But, on this film, they trusted

just used a stick figure [as a model]."

The magicians also get their own musical number in the film, *Playing with the Big Boys*, in which they teach Moses a thing or two about magic after the former prince changes his walking staff into a snake. Mate enjoyed the scene, as the directors "pretty much let me go where I wanted to go in terms of choreography and movement."

Huy and Hotep's big number, along with the opening *Deliver Us*, is one of six songs in the film from Stephen Schwartz, who has, quite literally, scored hits for Disney with *POCAHONTAS* and *HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME* (the underscore for *PRINCE OF EGYPT* is from *THE LION KING*'s Hans Zimmer). The other songs include *All I Ever Wanted*, sung early in the film, first by Moses and then the Queen, *Through Heaven's Eyes*, sung by Jethro, after Moses has come to live with the Midean tribe, the self-explanatory, *The Plagues*, and *When You Believe*, which serves as the anthem for the Hebrews' exodus.

P RINCE OF EGYPT uses its songs carefully, weaving it closely to the story, in order to heighten emotional moments and also to save audiences from listening to mountains of dialogue and exposition, but the film also dares to break the more conventional, musical formula that animation seems to have fallen into lately. "The subject matter just needed something more classical than Broadway," added Chapman. "It needed to feel epic. We all

thought that stopping for a number would be a little strange. It had to have the same feel as the rest of the movie."

Taking this new perspective on the animation paradigm most directly affected the "actors" of the medium, the animators themselves. In *PRINCE OF EGYPT*, there could be no outlandish "bug-eyed" takes, while at the same time, the characters couldn't just sit on the screen like talking heads. The animators were required to bring the subtle emotion of acting out through their drawings.

the animator a lot more."

By allowing their artists to step outside what's expected, DreamWorks may be creating more than just another tentpole offering for the big holiday rush. They could be fashioning the prototypical, revisionist animated movie with *THE PRINCE OF EGYPT*. The film may prove to be a tonic to those who have become jaded by the medium; a fresh alternative to what's been offered. "Or," reasoned director Hickner with a reflective pause, "maybe this is the new way."

AFQ



THE PRINCE OF EGYPT



*Art Direction
&
Production Design*

Having a lack of perspective would hurt most films. For *PRINCE OF EGYPT*, it was a guiding force.

Production designer Darek Gogol studied Egyptian artwork for the film and desperately wanted to capture the look in animation. Egyptians created art that had a very flat look, in which the people were depicted according to social stature, with royalty very large and commoners very small. To simply transfer this style to animation would have been an artistic leap and a ridiculous one at that.

"What I found was that removing the vanishing points and trying to hide them helped to show the flatness of the architecture," said Gogol. "For example, in a Renaissance drawing, you see the vanishing point in the middle of the church, then the columns come up closer to us and everything goes into one point. That way we know that perspective exists. That's the Western way of thinking about perspective. If we remove this vanishing point in the frame of the film and we overlap columns against each other, it looks more Egyptian."

In other words: to gain cultural perspective, Gogol took literal perspective away. Then, to show the power of the Egyptian Pharaoh and his family, Gogol designed a look that exaggerated the size of the Egyptian architecture, so that it seemingly dwarfed the Hebrew world.

This look was solidified by a pre-production trip to Egypt, in which the film makers saw that Gogol's exaggerations of the architecture weren't exaggerations at all. "We've seen the Empire State Building, we've seen the World Trade Center," noted Gogol. "Yet, when you go to Egypt, you're still overwhelmed with the size [of the structures]. You try to figure how the Egyptians built this over 3,000 years ago, when the tallest thing that they'd ever seen in their lives was a palm tree."

The trip served as a true flashpoint for *PRINCE OF EGYPT*'s art directors as well. "For me, it was a lot of the landscapes," remembered Kathy Altieri, one of the film's two art directors. "A lot of the countryside there, if you can call it that, is pretty barren. When you drive out to the Sinai peninsula, there are some absolutely striking visuals that happen in the natural rock formations. What hit me about it, since my area is color, was that it was pretty colorless. You could imagine the colors that these people had on their clothes. The fabric and the textiles played up against that background. It really had a lot of possibilities for us."

Along with the trip, *PRINCE OF EGYPT*'s look was also influenced by the epic scope and human scale that di-

PRODUCTION DESIGNER DAREK GOGOL:

"When you go to Egypt, you're overwhelmed with the size. You wonder how they built the pyramids when the tallest thing they'd ever seen was a palm tree."

rector David Lean brought to such films as *LAWRENCE OF ARABIA*. The work of artist Claude Monet was also studied to try and capture his use of lighting. This all came together to form a distinct, but not an overwhelming, style.

"If you're doing a comedy, you can definitely take a lot of license with the look of all of the elements," said *PRINCE*'s other art director, Richie Chavez. "But, when you're doing a Biblical story, in order for the audience to believe it and take it seriously, you really can't go too cartoony. It has to have an elegance and a believability to it. The stylization is there, but I don't think it's to such an extreme that you're aware of it. All of the sets and all of the environments feel real, but there's a sense of a unity of design, whether it be the organic or the architecture."

Because art directors and production designers are with a film from its earliest days, Altieri said that watching all the elements come together to form *PRINCE OF EGYPT* was especially gratifying. "We all came from different studios, different countries and different

backgrounds. So, you've got this huge diversity of opinion and of artistic style. To have each of those [elements] feed the story and feed the visuals in different ways, to watch that develop, as well as watching all the artists develop and get better through the course of the film, has been one of the most exciting things."

"These films are not easy to make," added Gogol. "For many people, they look like drawings with some fun stuff and jokes thrown in, but they are very challenging. They require an enormous amount of sacrifice, for the better of the whole project."

Chavez found a more athletic analogy for animation: "You have to pace yourself. It's like a marathon, and it's a long run."

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Mike Lyons

OPPOSITE: He looked good in the rushes. Production designer Darek Gogol removed vanishing points from *PRINCE OF EGYPT*'s art in order to recreate the drawing style of ancient Egypt. The results are clearly evident when the Pharaoh's wife rescues the infant Moses from the river Nile. **BELOW:** Production designer Gogol.



KATZENBERG'S COMEBACK

DREAMWORKS ANIMATION

First-film anxieties and home-turf cliques were not enough to keep the former Amblimation studio from morphing into one of the most eagerly anticipated production houses of the past few years.

It was supposed to be a nice, relaxing wrap party for *THE PRINCE OF EGYPT*'s production crew. For Brenda Chapman, it was anything but. As a "thank you," it was announced that the crew would be treated to a screening of *THE MASK OF ZORRO*, and as a surprise — for everyone including Chapman — the assemblage would also be amongst the first to see the trailer for *THE PRINCE OF EGYPT*.

"It was just the trailer, but I was so nervous," admitted Chapman. "I thought I was going to be sick. I was shaking in the back of the theater, and this was with my own crew!"

Chapman isn't the only one harboring this anxiety. In fact, not since Walt built his empire around a mouse has so much attention revolved around a new animation studio. Adding to this interest is the fact that Jeffrey Katzenberg — the captain who helped steer the "S.S. Disney Animation" through treacherous waters and into an all-out comeback of, oddly enough, fairy tale proportions — is now hoping to do the same for DreamWorks. "He's got an uncanny knack for entertainment and pointing a movie toward where it should go," noted *PRINCE OF EGYPT* co-director, Steve Hickner.

Katzenberg had come to Disney from live-action, but soon fell in love, and in sync, with the art of telling a story through animation. In 1994, when Katzenberg left Disney, forming DreamWorks SKG with Steven Spielberg and David Geffen, he announced that one of their top priorities would be the establishment of an animation studio. Since then, those within and outside the industry have been holding their breath.

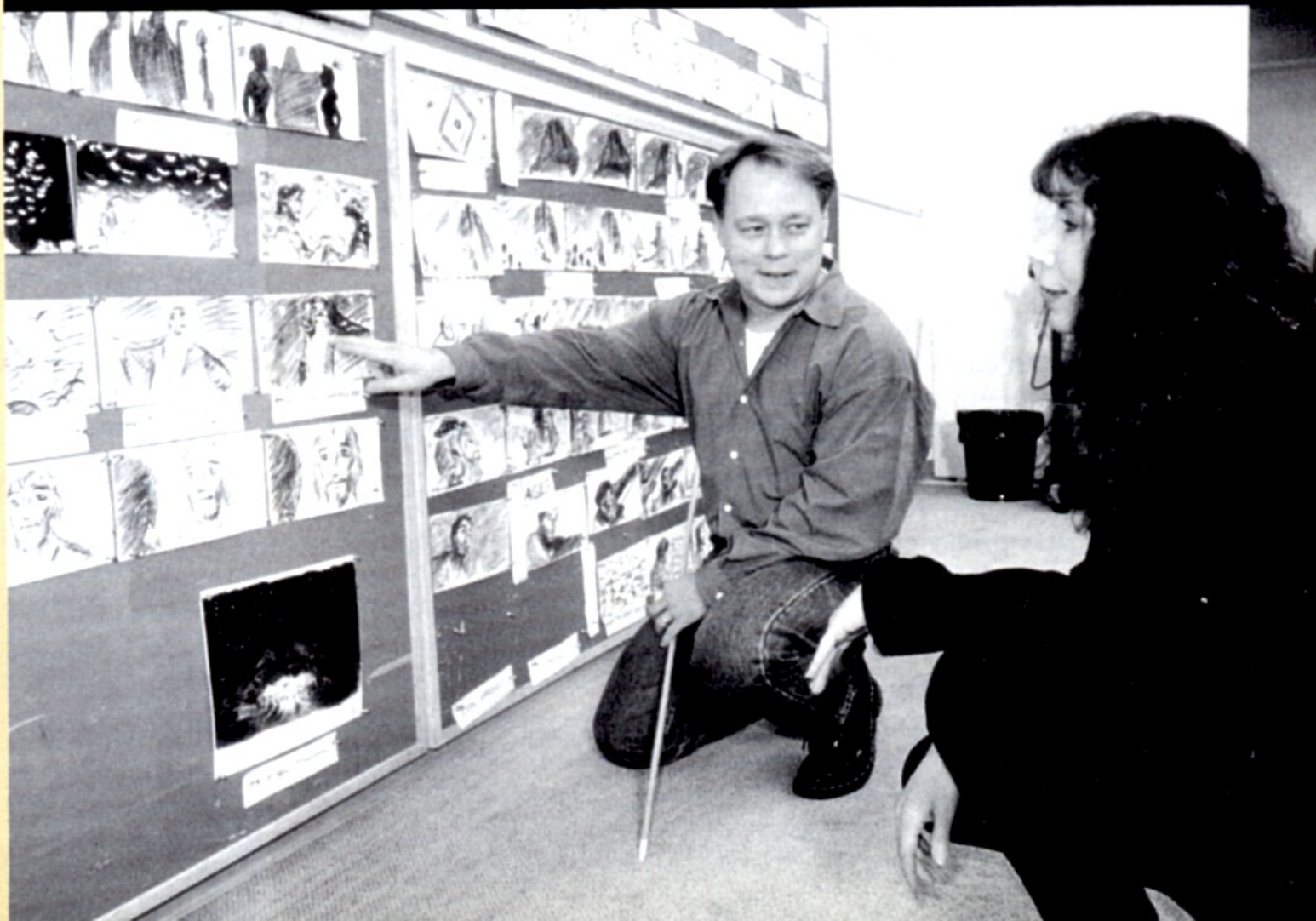
Meanwhile, the artists at Amblimation were ready to exhale. The London-based animation studio, established by Steven Spielberg at the precipice of the medium's resurgence, was "folded into" DreamWorks. With modest budgets and capable artistry, Amblimation held its own with films like 1991's sequel *AN AMERICAN TAIL: FEIVEL GOES WEST*, the dinosaur fable *WE'RE BACK* (1993) and the extremely underrated adventure film, *BALTO* (1995).

Amblimation's next project was slated to be *CATS*, an animated version of the An-

drew Lloyd Webber Broadway hit. Animator William Salazar was one of the many set to draw felines, not Egyptians. "Spielberg and Katzenberg said, 'We want to take you all over to DreamWorks,'" remembered the animator. "We didn't know what their project was and then when they told us, I said, 'What?! *THE TEN COMMANDMENTS*?!'"

Simon Wells, who had co-directed all of Amblimation's films, found that when the artists came to the California DreamWorks studio, they had already been labeled the

NEW VISION: Heads of Story Kelly Asbury (left) and Lorna Cook (right) scrutinize the storyboards for DreamWorks Animation's debut feature, *THE PRINCE OF EGYPT*. Gambling that the world is ready to take animation seriously.





STAR-STUDED SUPPORT GROUP: Supervising animator Patrick Mate (below) worked on comic court magicians Huy and Hotep, voiced by Martin Short and Steve Martin, respectively. Supervising animator Rodolph Guenoden took on Moses' wife Tzipporah, cueing off of Michelle Pfeiffer's spontaneous line readings.



"also rans." "The people that I had the privilege to work with in London are some of the top animators and artists in the world. Yet, when we first came over, there was a quiet, unspoken value judgment: 'The European animators aren't as good as the Americans.' So, to see the realization dawn on people that these guys *are* really world class talent has been a vindication."

Soon, many of Disney's top artists also made their way to DreamWorks, unable to resist the lure of being part of something new. For Brenda Chapman, who had worked in Disney's story department, her jump to DreamWorks has been ground-breaking in the industry. By co-directing *THE PRINCE OF EGYPT*, Chapman shatters a glass ceiling as the first female director of an animated feature film.

Chapman (whose husband, Kevin Lima, still works at Disney and will direct the studio's next feature, *TARZAN*) said the choice to come over to DreamWorks was simple. "I had been riding this wave and I thought, 'What the heck, I'll just catch another one and see what happens.'"

Like the many other fully-loaded animation studios, DreamWorks' 800 artists are gearing up for future projects. Next year brings *THE ROAD TO EL DORADO*, a comic adventure set in 1519 that tells the story of a pair of con artist stowaways who inadvertently discover the fabled Lost City of Gold. *EL DORADO* will feature the voices of Kenneth Branagh, Kevin Kline and Rosie Perez, with music by *THE LION KING* team of Tim Rice and Elton John.

The year 2000 brings *SHREK*, another DreamWorks/Pacific Data Images co-venture (this fall's *ANTZ* was their first). This skewed fairy tale will tell the story of an ogre, and include the voices of Eddie Murphy, Cameron Diaz and John Lithgow. After *SHREK*, DreamWorks will release *CHICKEN RUN*, the first full-length feature from the stop-motion Aardman studio, about a rooster named Rocky (voiced by Mel Gibson) who leads an all out exodus from a

chicken farm.

For DreamWorks' artists, what's most exciting is that the studio's future has yet to be written. "All of the films being made at DreamWorks have nothing in common with each other and nothing in common with anything else that's going on out there," said Kelly Asbury, co-head of story on *PRINCE OF EGYPT*, who next will co-direct *SHREK*. "You work anyplace long enough and they develop a house style and they develop a certain thing that's expected of them based on what success they've had. At DreamWorks, we aren't painted into that corner yet and I hope that we never are."

Everything at DreamWorks is, metaphorically, very much like a blank sheet of animation paper. And,

for those ready to draw, the excitement of being on the ground floor is palpable. As Steve Hickner said: "It's been great to have been here for 'The Big Bang!'" **AFQ**

Mike Lyons

LOCKED-OUT IN LOS ANGELES:

"The people that I worked with in London are some of the best animators in the world," said co-director Simon Wells.

"Yet when we first came over, there was this unspoken value judgement: 'The Europeans aren't as good as the Americans.'"



*Courting the inner demon with the **PRIEST** and the **BEAST***

by L. JAGI
LAMPLIGHTER

Imagine a Japanese Calvin and Hobbs, if Calvin were in high school and Hobbs' dearest desire in life was to eat Calvin. Get that image fixed in your mind and you are well on your way to picturing **USHIO & TORA**, a charming and funny anime about a boy and his monster.

Teenage Ushio has little patience for his father's boring tales about an ancient demon, and even less interest in the news that the temple where dad and son reside was built on top of the fiend. Despite the fact that the boy is in training to be a priest himself, he tends to dismiss such myths as the rantings of a senile elder. Then he discovers the demon is still alive in the cellar. The bloodthirsty monster has spent the last 500 years pinned to the wall by the Beast Spear, an arcane weapon originally wielded by the boy's ancestor. When the jagged-haired, tiger-like demon commands the youth to withdraw the spear and release him, Ushio asks what the demon plans to do with his freedom. The demon replies honestly: he plans to eat Ushio and then devour his family and neighbors. The boy decides to take a pass.

He hasn't counted on the particular Pandora's box he's opened in discovering the monster. As the temple is overrun with otherworldly creatures attracted by the demon's

malevolent aura, Ushio realizes he needs the beast's assistance if he is to cleanse the grounds of the infesting evil. Eventually, he strikes a bargain with the demon — whom he dubs Tora (Tiger) — and withdraws the spear. When Tora tries to renege on their deal, the Beast Spear takes on a life of its own, turning Ushio into a super demon-slayer who, with his five or six feet of long, spiky hair, looks amazingly like the ancestor who first defeated Tora. Cowed, the demon postpones his plan to begin eating humans in favor of haunting Ushio — in the hopes that he might one day be able to catch the boy unaware and satisfy his hunger for revenge (and human flesh).

From this dubious beginning, a quite unlikely and extremely uneasy friendship develops. While neither will admit affection for the other, Ushio and Tora continue to come to each other's defense. Ushio is driven to protect the demon by a basic sense of decency, while Tora's fondness for the boy slowly grows as he begins to recognize the nobleness of Ushio's spirit. He justifies his actions by telling himself that he's protecting his dinner, though we often hear him muttering, "Why the hell am I helping this kid?" Over time, the two grow into a coordinated duo and begin taking seriously their self-imposed task of protecting the people of

Japan from the horrors that haunt them.

A demon trapped and tamed by an ancient family weapon might seem familiar to fans of **TENCHI MUYO**. However, what few American viewers realize is that in Japan, **USHIO & TORA** came well before many of its more familiar imitators. Matt Greenfield, producer of the American version which is being distributed through A D Vision, explained, "Fans think it is a newer show because they've never seen it before. Actually, **USHIO & TORA** is four or five years old in Japan. We get letters claiming that **USHIO & TORA** is derivative of **TENCHI MUYO** or **ZENKI**, but really, it's the other way around."

Like many successful anime, **USHIO & TORA** began life as a manga in *Shonen Sunday Weekly*, the most popular weekly manga magazine in Japan and the original publishers of such successful manga as *Ramona 1/2* and *Mai the Psychic Girl*. Kazuhiro Fujita, the author, has been writing for *Shonen Sunday* since his rookie days, beginning with his prize-winning *Ferry Boat Mystery*. More recently, he has been treating readers to *Karikuri Circus*, another dark comedy concerning a protagonist who suffers from an unusual ailment: he will choke to death if he



THE WILDING URGE: In an uneasy truce, student-priest Ushio and bloodthirsty demon Tora join forces to battle ancient evils. The risks of their craft: eternal damnation for the boy; possible redemption for the beast.

does not make people laugh.

The story of how USHIO was transformed from printed page to video is a bit complicated. Four separate companies are listed under "Producer" on the box. "Toho is a distribution company," Greenfield explained. "In the case of USHIO & TORA, they were also the producer. They financed the whole project. Toshiba EMI is a video production company. Shogakukan is the publishing company that owns *Shonen Sunday Weekly*. They're the owners of the actual USHIO property. I believe OB Kikaku is a studio."

Was OB Kikaku the studio that actually animated USHIO & TORA? Greenfield says no: "In Japan, groups of companies come together for the purpose of making a video. None of them are actually the studio that inks the show. Many studios do subcontract work when they are between projects. This is where the production company groups get their studios." In the case of USHIO & TORA, the actual animation studio is an unknown called Pastel. "Even that might not be a real studio," Greenfield warned. "It could be a temporary conglomeration of several studios working together for this project."

Perhaps best known for their ownership of GODZILLA, Toho is no stranger to anime. Among many others, they have distributed such familiar titles as KIMAGURE ORANGE ROAD and BOAH. Most recently, Toho achieved a phenomenal success with MONONOKEHIME (THE

PRINCESS MONONOKE), the latest work by Hayao Miyazaki which will be released in the U.S. next year by Disney-owned Miramax.

Beyond corporate concerns, the other names associated with the creation of USHIO & TORA were veterans in the field as well. Nozomu Sasaki, the voice of Ushio, has provided such well-known voices as Mackie Stingray in BUBBLEGUM CRISIS and Tetsuo in AKIRA. Chikako Otsuka, who performs superbly as the wry voice of Tora, has previously appeared as Dr. Gnomm in WINGS OF HONNEAMISE, and as Balzer in SPACE BATTLESHIP YAMATO. He has also provided voices for numerous anime not yet available in America; including the voice of the creepy Hades in ARION — an excellent anime depicting the fall of the Greek gods.

Director Kunihiro Yuyama and character designer Norihiro Matsubara also worked together on SLOW STEP, another Shogakukan property that has been made into an anime. Unlike most anime American audiences are familiar with, SLOW STEP is a *shojo* anime — intended for girls rather than boys.

The existing episodes of USHIO & TORA are said to be very close to the original manga, with the exception of episode four, an eerie outing featuring the spirit of a water wheel and his endless quest to be "turned" (ahem) by Ushio's sometime girlfriend, Asako. With

33 manga issues and only seven separate video episodes (four half-hour episodes, and three hour-long episodes), one cannot help asking will the rest of the manga ever be illustrated? No one knows for sure.

Matt Greenfield, though, believes there's hope: "Toho is very much known for keeping franchises alive. Sometimes they wait a period before releasing later videos. For instance, there was a break of two years between DEVIL HUNTER YOHKO volume 1 and volumes 2 through 4. Then there was another break before they released volume 5, and another break before YOHKO SQUARED, which was released in America as DEVIL HUNTER YOHKO 6. USHIO & TORA was very successful in Japan, so they might be planning to bring it back. On the other hand, TENCHI MUYO appeals to the same group of fans and is currently filling the void fairly well. So they may have decided to stop because of that."

When asked about the difference between TENCHI and USHIO, Greenfield summed it up: "TENCHI has all those cute women, but USHIO is a little more gung ho and has a darker side. USHIO is basically a comedy which delves into the darker side of things. How many other anime have episodes where the characters get eaten?"

While USHIO & TORA is definitely a comedy, the light-hearted mood which runs throughout much of the series is often disrupted for scenes of spine-chilling horror. One moment, we see Ushio in class with an invisible Tora perched on his shoulders. In

BAD HAIR BOY: The Beast Spear, a magical weapon with a mind of its own, held Tora captive for five hundred years. When Ushio grabs ahold, the feral power turns the boy into an unconquerable slayer of demons. Now, if only it were a little gentler on the follicles...



the next moment, the school air is rent by screams as innocent school girls are turned to stone or thrown from roof tops. In the episode where demonic flying heads hunt downtown Tokyo for the priestess who imprisoned them, the heads bloodily decapitate numerous women before they settle on a target. In the final episode, an entire village — men, women, and children — is graphically

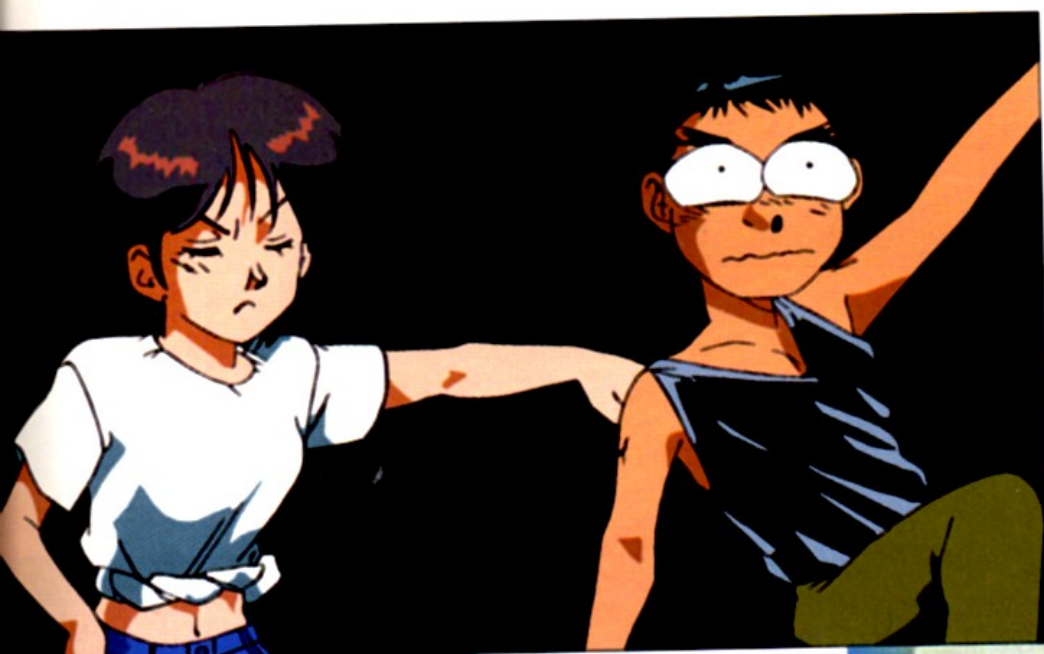
to Tora at sea can only manifest himself in the presence of water. When he wishes to ask Ushio for help, he must speak out of a dripping shower or a nearby pool. When the spirit of the water wheel leaves his home to search for the woman he loves, he hides in other spinning objects: an electric fan; the wheel of a rail road car; the whining turbine of a jet engine.

"Japanese mythology really is ghost stories for the most part," Greenfield explains. "And the Japanese have been mining these stories for some time now. They have gotten quite good at it. GI-GI-GI NO KITTARO, one of the earliest animes to become successful, followed the story of a

the X-Men and other Marvel heroes. Seeing him at battle or crouched to strike, one has little trouble understanding why Ushio gave him a name which belongs both to a sleek, powerful animal and to a popular Japanese super hero.

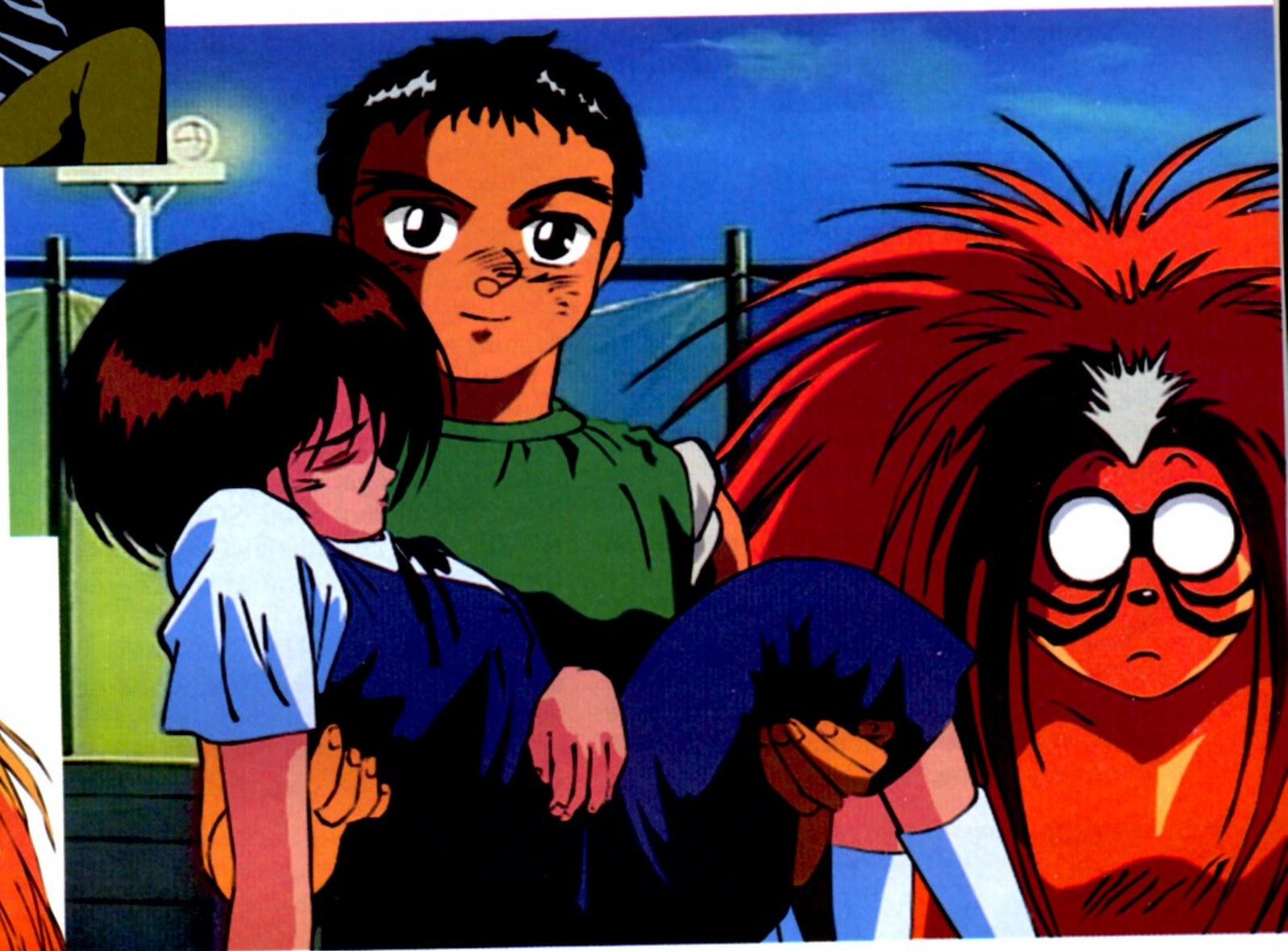
There is one exception to the otherwise laudable quality of the animation: Ushio's nose. In about half the scenes, especially on sideways or three-quarter shots, this facial feature must be the ugliest and most annoying nose in all anime: round and blobby, it has a prominence that suggests it might well have a life of its own. As bold and unique as U&T's sketch-pad graphic style is, when it comes to Ushio's nose, the artists might well have been better-served if they had played it just a little more conservatively.

Asked about the artistic technique used in USHIO & TORA, Matt Greenfield



slaughtered.

One of the things which gives USHIO & TORA its dark mood is that its villains are drawn from authentic Chinese and Japanese ghost stories. Unlike many anime enemies who are merely violent or disgusting, these villains are bound by the eerie laws which in legend constrict the actions of supernatural creatures. The watery ghost who comes up



TRUE LOVE? Girlfriend Asako frequently makes a show of assertiveness (upper left), but in fact often ends up as (above). **LEFT:** The main cast of USHIO & TORA.



young ghost hunter."

The animation in USHIO & TORA is well-executed, moving easily between the light cheerfulness of the comedic scenes to the dark, moody images of the horror sequences. The illustrators often pause for wonderfully dramatic shots of the long-haired demon hunter and the ferocious demon. Tora is particularly well-drawn. While he at times appears cute or even dopey, he sheds these qualities when the action begins and shines in all his vibrant and vicious glory. His rippling muscles are depicted in a manner reminiscent of

replied, "The art style really depends upon the style of the manga. When they're making manga into anime, they try to stick to the same style, usually consulting the same artist. The one exception I know of is **BATTLE ANGEL**: the manga artist actually requested that they have someone else do the character design for the movie. Animation figures have to be simpler and bolder than what can be achieved in a manga. Sometimes figures which look good in mangas look odd when animated.

"The other thing you have to keep in mind when looking at anime art styles is that most of the people working in the anime field in Japan would prefer to be making

live-action films. Whenever they have a chance to do something differently, they do."

This goes some way towards explaining the Super-Deformed episodes as well. Super-Deformed, or SD, refers to the style of cartooning when the characters are drawn to look like cute little children. AD Vision has included a bonus half-hour of SD episodes at the end of the fifth tape. In these episodes, child-like Ushio and Tora are seen in various daily scenes, the most charming of which is Tora's encounter with a kitten.

"Basically," Greenfield explains, "in Super-Deformed episodes, the directors are having fun. It's their way of saying, 'Okay, this is outside of the regular universe, we're just having fun now.' Super-Deformed pieces started because people said, 'Oh, they're so cute!' However, they caught on and some Super-Deformed works went on to become their own series. It's a lot like the little live-action pieces which appear at the ends of some videos. Another sign that anime people are basically frustrated live-action directors.

"One of the big distributors, Bandai, used to regularly put out a little episode called BIRUMAN. Biruman dressed much like Japan's most famous hero Ultraman; he wore the same silver suit, but had a pot-belly and spent most of his time scratching. When he wanted to call on his powers, instead of flying off to the sun, he opened a beer."

Greenfield expressed his pleasure at having had the chance to produce the subtitled version of USHIO & TORA. "I always wanted to do USHIO & TORA. It's fun and silly, but has some good story points. It's a pleasure to be able to release the most interesting shows! We see something, say 'That's cool!' and go

running after it. Fortunately, AD Vision is in a position now where we can actually get many titles we want. This is a big change from the early days, when we had to take what we could get. Not that some of our early works were not good. SOL BIANCA and DEVIL HUNTER YOHKO are good titles! But, back then, some of the bigger fish slipped away from us."

Currently, USHIO & TORA is only available in subtitle. However, a dubbed version is expected, though not yet scheduled. Rod Peters, the president of AD Vision, explained his company's policy on the

matter of subtitles vs. dubbing: "Almost 95% of our titles are both subtitled and dubbed," said Mr. Peters. "In the beginning, we catered to the anime fans only by just doing subtitled versions. Even though a lot of our fans do not speak Japanese, they still like to hear the original Japanese voices of the characters. Then, we have the general audience who prefer to watch the dubbed version because having to read subtitles takes away from watching what is going on in the films. We listened to the fans, and now we have products that cater to all who want to watch."

Greenfield reports that USHIO & TORA has already found a core audience of fans in America. With any luck, this audience will grow large enough to encourage Toho to animate more of this delightful work. If not that, maybe we can at least encourage them to issue the Tora plushie that so many fans are calling for. Seems some people are not satisfied until they can sleep tight, with maybe *some* potential that, this night, the demons will bite.

AFQ



TOP LEFT: Kleenex alert: USHIO & TORA's distinctive sketchbook style results in a demon-slayer who might want to consider radical rhinoplasty in the near future. **TOP RIGHT:** A new hairstyle can help draw attention from those unsightly facial blemishes. **BELOW LEFT AND RIGHT:** Tora in action. Despite his better instincts, the beast frequently finds himself facing-off against fellow demons.



The Secrets of

USHIO & Tora

The best badguys are found in the depths of history

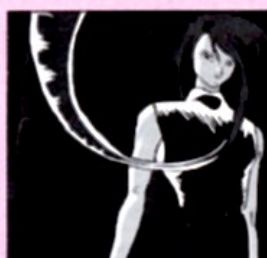
Ghosts. Demons. Maniacal flying heads. The enemies faced by Ushio and Tora are drawn from Chinese and Japanese myths and legends. In Japanese mythology, many supernatural creatures come from exaggerations of the ordinary: human passions, water wheels, animals, souls of the drowned. As Ushio and Tora face these enemies, Ushio himself is drawn more and more deeply into the world of spirits and demons, running the risk of losing his own humanity.

Initially, after freeing Tora, Ushio faces creatures that are simply monstrous. It is not until episode three that Ushio first risks falling into the demonic mindset himself. He encounters a seal magician, a man who can use the power of his calligraphy to sap the strength of his enemies. Seal magicians are nothing new to anime fans; similar figures appear in DOOMED MEGALOPOLIS, JUDGE, and even RANMA 1/2. In Ushio's case, he tries to mislead the gentleman, in hopes that the magician might rid him of Tora forever. Later, regretting his decision, he risks his life to set things right.

In episode four, the only episode not taken from the original manga, Ushio encounters a wheel spirit, a creature with all the eeriness and mystery of a Japanese ghost. In typical Asian tradition, it was not an act of cruelty that attracts the spirit to Ushio's girlfriend, Asako, but an act of kindness. Charmed by the little girl who spun his water wheel, the spirit decides that he

is in love. However, what the spirit offers is not human love, but a deadly mockery of it; his inherent inhumanity makes it impossible for him to understand the needs of the human heart.

We are never told where the



murderous flying heads that terrorize downtown Tokyo in episodes five and six originate from, but the Aya-

CROSSED CULTURE: Ushio & Tora, surrounded by a handful of their adversaries: spirits sprung from Asian mythology.

which swallows Asako in episodes seven and eight was once human, being an amalgam created from the souls of the drowned. In the final two episodes, Ushio encounters the Kamaitachi. *Kamaitachi* means paper cut. The word, however, also has an older meaning: "invisi-

ble cut from the air." The Japanese used to believe that such cuts had been made by a hungry monster attempting to feed.



In USHIO & TORA, this superstition is combined with another Asian belief, that animals of venerable age gain the ability to take on a human shape.



Thus, Ushio encounters the sickle weasels, who both wound and heal, and walk among us as men.

Though the anime series ends at this point, later issues of the manga reveal many more secrets. Long ago, a dreaded demon called the Hakumen no Mono (Monster of a Hundred Faces) ravaged the village of a young blacksmith. The smith vowed to forge a weapon that

could defeat the demon. Desperate to stop the monster, his sister sacrificed her life by infusing her spirit into the spear's blade. Torn with sorrow, the smith finished forging the Beast Spear. Then, he himself became the spear's shaft.

Ushio discovers that the Hakumen no Mono itself was created by the terrible hatred of a lone warrior. Later in his life, this warrior learned of the great evil he had created. Taking up the Beast Spear, he vowed to devote his life to hunting down the Hakumen no Mono, only to discover that whoever wields the weapon becomes consumed by hatred, eventually becoming a demon creature himself. The repentant warrior who used the Beast Spear to pursue the Hakumen no Mono thus became the demon we know as Tora.

Towards the end of the manga, the Hakumen no Mono — guarded by Ushio's long-lost mother — escapes, and a terrible battle ensues. After the monster is defeated, the demons created by the Beast Spear fade away — including Tora. Ushio, the wielder of the Beast Spear, begins to transform into a demon himself. However, the spirit of the blacksmith's sister intervenes, restoring his humanity. Ushio is reunited with his mother and returns home. He is lonely without Tora. Yet, the author has hinted that demons are unpredictable creatures, leaving readers — and viewers — with the hope that Tora might someday reappear.

APQ

L. Jagi Lamplighter

QUEST FOR CAMELOT

**WARNERS PLANNED TO TAKE DISNEY ON HEAD-TO-HEAD.
THEN MICHAEL JORDAN RETURNED TO BASKETBALL...**

by ERIC
LURIO

Animated films are a lot like sausages. They can be tasty, but sometimes watching the manufacturing process can ruin your appetite. So it was for Warner Bros. and the company's second fully animated theatrical feature, *QUEST FOR CAMELOT*.

A lot of people wouldn't talk to us about it. Others would, but not on the record. There's a group of people who've been vociferously denouncing the thing over the Internet, claiming that one of the two original directors, Bill Kroyer, was ousted by a cadre of evil "suits" who then placed the project in the hands of a director and producer who proceeded to turn an original work of genius into a piece of garbage. It wasn't like that at all.

It isn't that everything was always hunky-dory in the cubicles; as we shall see, it was not. But turmoil is par for the course in this type of enterprise, and there was plenty of it here.

Warner Bros. has always had a love/hate relationship with animation, but in 1993 no one could ignore the phenomenal success of Disney's *ALADDIN* and *THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS*. So a risky decision was made: Disney would be challenged.

Enter Dellisa Cooper Cohen. She had produced a number of children's features and was a vice president at Turner Pictures. She would create WBA's feature development unit. She was followed by Bill and Sue Kroyer, who had made the relatively successful *FERNGULLY* for Fox and whose Kroyer Studio was now foundering. They were joined by Fredrick Du Chou, a Belgian who'd just finished co-di-

recting *LAND BEFORE TIME III*, and Frank Gladstone, who'd been in charge of training at Disney.

By January of 1995 there were three front-runners for the honor of first big feature: *KING TUT*, an Egyptian adventure; *CYRANO*, based on the famous play with music by Carol Bayer Sager and Neil Diamond; and *THE DAMSEL KNIGHT*, based on *THE KING'S DAMSEL* by Vera Chapman, with music by David Foster.

The announcement of Dreamworks' *PRINCE OF EGYPT* killed *KING TUT* immediately. *CYRANO* was deemed to too close to *HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME* and Diamond and Bayer Sager were invited to help Foster with *DAMSEL KNIGHT*. Diamond, who'd been working six months on the project, was the first to leave Warner Feature Animation in a huff.

Shortly afterwards, WBA was cut in three: TV, which would do *ANIMANIACS*, *FREAKAZOID*, *BATMAN*, and the like; Classic, which would handle the classic characters for theatrical shorts and commercials; and Features, which was doing what was now called *QUEST FOR THE GRAIL*.

WBFA's first president, Max Howard, entered the picture about a month after production was announced. Cooper Cohen was promoted to vice president in charge of creative affairs. The start of production was announced in May 1995. Unfortunately, *Q4tG* wasn't really ready to start yet. There was a basic conflict as to how to go: darker and meaner towards a more adult audience; or more "Disneysque," to court the under-12 crowd who would make Mommy and Daddy buy the video and licensed knickknacks.

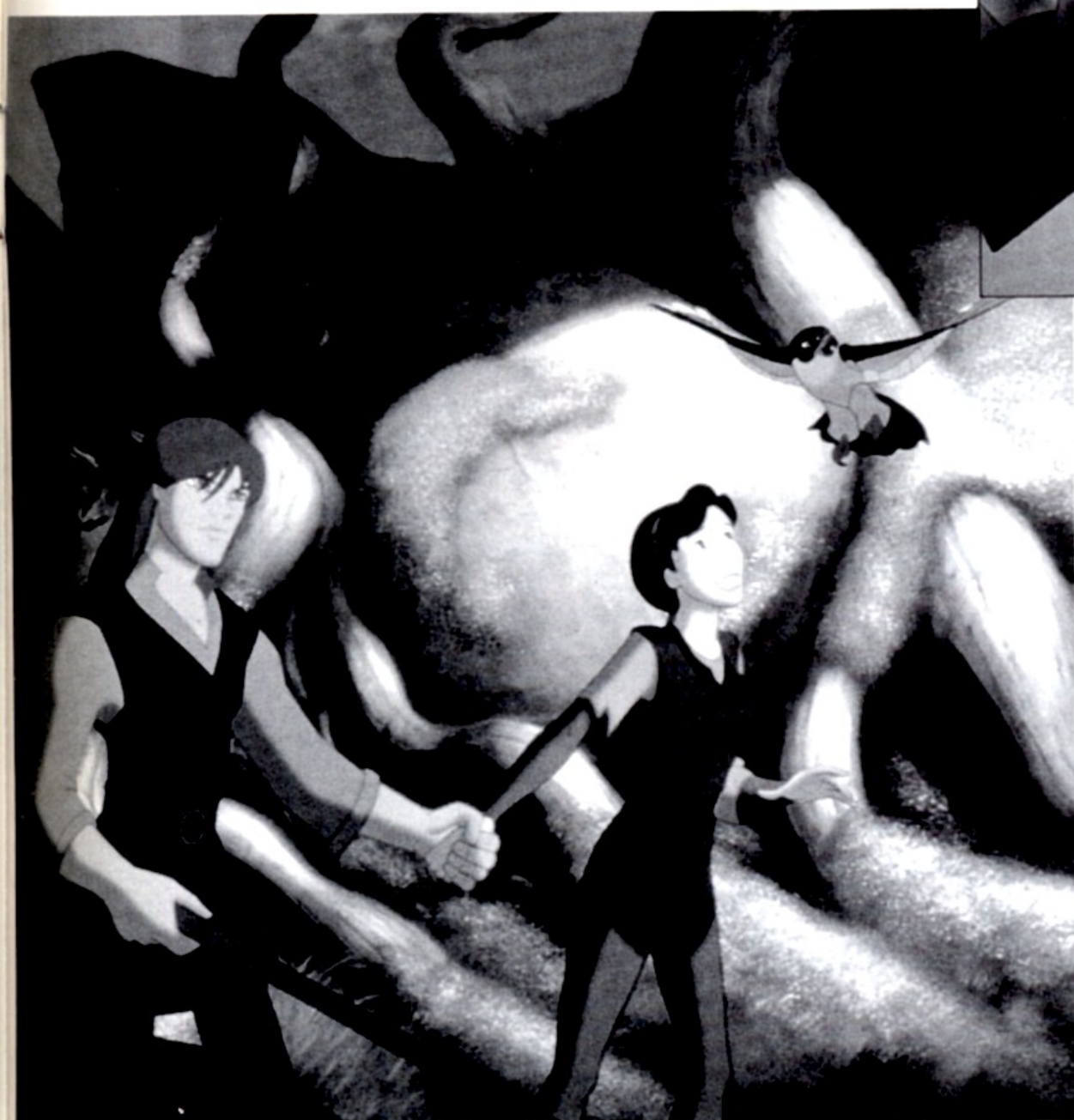
Then there was another problem. Basketball star Michael Jordan had recently returned to the game, and there now was a hook for the Bugs Bunny feature IvAn Reitman was working on. Production for *SPACE JAM* was announced a month after *Q4tG* and was given much higher priority. Within months, a project that had been earmarked for production by a small "boutique" studio had grown to engulf pretty much all of WB's animation resources outside of TV, including the staff of *QUEST*.

"*SPACE JAM* was the best thing to happen to the studio," said Max Howard, to which Cooper Cohen readily agreed. To some extent that's true. WBFA was top-heavy at the beginning, and the animators, assistants, inbetweeners, et al, were an untested team who, through the *SPACE JAM* experience, were able to work their way to a fully functioning, animation

WACKY PACK: Bladebeak (below) was just one colorful character in a film that also offered up a pair of Siamese dragons (voiced by Don Rickles and Eric Idle) and a scatterbrained griffen. Yup, there is such a thing as too much comic relief.



DAMSEL IN DIS DRESS: A tough, plucky Linnet was eventually cutened down to a more conventionally perky Kayley (shown below with blind beefcake Garret) for Warner's *QUEST FOR CAMELOT*. **RIGHT:** Gary Oldman bit heartily into the role of arch fiend Rugar, once again providing a villain far more interesting than the heroes.



cord. He was replaced by Pierce Brosnan.

Linnet's name was changed to Kayley and Jane Seymour had to rerecord her part too. Pretty much everyone was called back for retakes. "There were 15 writers, I think that's too many," Bayer Sager recalled.

With *SPACE JAM* finished in November of 1996, the brass turned their attention to *QUEST*. Gladstone was

mored \$100+ mil. budget, the combined costs of production and setting up an entire animation studio), Du Chou and company had managed to finish the damn thing. What they came up with was a nicely done Disney clone. Test screenings showed that the target audience — children 5 to 12 — liked the film, while their parents found it more than tolerable. That was something many recent animated features, outside of those from the Mouse House itself, couldn't boast.

THE QUEST FOR CAMELOT opened on May 15th on 3,107 screens, playing against the strong second week of *DEEP IMPACT* and Touchstone's *THE HORSE WHISPERER*, a major film of the summer. No one was expecting it to beat either of those blockbusters before everyone got flattened underfoot by *GODZILLA*, and, of course, it didn't. In the first weekend, *QUEST* took in \$6.4 million at the box-office, averaging \$2,060/screen. The brass was hoping for at least ten. Reviews were decidedly mixed. Most of the negative notices were angry that it was a kid's film. All in all, it's a pretty straightforward effort, with bland but realistic leads and animals that could give the *ANIMANIACS* a run for their wackiness buck. In combination, it really didn't work all that well.

The results: the staff that's working on WBFA's next film, Brad Bird's *IRON GIANT*, is about half the size of that on *QUEST*. The Kroyer's *UNKET* and another project, *ZOO*, haven't been greenlighted yet, and there's no real telling if they ever will. It would be sad to see Warner go the way of Universal's and MGM's animation studios, which were reduced to producing Saturday morning programming and direct to video fluff after opening with such grandiose hopes. Brad Bird is now in the hot seat — if *IRON GIANT* doesn't deliver, then Warner Bros. Feature Animation may become just another footnote in the studio's volatile flirtation with the animated arts.

unit. *QUEST FOR THE GRAIL*, though, was back in development hell.

The number of writers increased. The story of the tomboy Linnet going off to save her sister Susanna by finding the Holy Grail was bent out of shape. Songs were dumped, characters vanished, others became prominent. *QUEST FOR THE GRAIL* became *QUEST FOR CAMELOT*.

The Disneyesque side was winning, and the Kroyers were none too happy about it. They had another, partially animated project, *UNKET*, that was in development before *QUEST* was greenlighted. Shifting their efforts to *UNKET* was an honorable way out of the mess; the Kroyers were given an office and a budget, and may move into full production soon.

Du Chou was now in sole command. The process of rewriting went on. Christopher Reeve voiced the part of King Arthur, and everybody was thrilled. Unfortunately, the writers subsequently rewrote his part and the actor was working on another project when they asked him to come back and rere-

fired, and so were the heads of layout and background (two lead animators had quit when the Kroyers did). Du Chou was told he had six weeks to justify the project or that was it.

Credit the director's powers of persuasion: *QUEST* became a go project. Cooper Cohen, who was on the project from before the beginning, was now producer. Du Chou was safe in his job. The near-death experience was over. Now came the hard part. It was January of '97, only a few yards of film were complete and the thing was supposed to come out the following November. No way in hell could they do that. The release date was delayed 'til the following May.

Warner had a studio in London left over from the *SPACE JAM* effort. Denmark's A Film, and the U.S.' Yowsa and Hearts of Texas took up some of the slack. "We worked around the clock," Cooper Cohen recalls.

After 16 months and anywhere from \$50 to \$120 million (the latter figure allegedly incorporating, as did *SPACE JAM*'s ru-

Talk about your local color: Sylvain Chomet's **THE OLD LADY AND THE PIGEONS** kicks off with an image that wouldn't seem out of place on a souvenir postcard — a cute, little old lady feeds birds in a Parisian park — and in no time veers off into an engagingly macabre examination of hunger in the urban ecology. With its vivid, caricature-laden imagery, and a wry storyline that — in its depiction of starving gendarmes and comfy if ultimately cold-blooded grannies — smells slightly of Bunuel, it's no surprise that the film has managed to net a couple of grand prizes from both the Annecy Animation Festival and the Los Angeles World Animation Celebration, as well as top honors from BAFTA and the Montreal Film Festival and a 1997 Oscar nomination for best animated short. That it took almost ten years for this wicked little comedy to find its way to the screen stands as tribute to Chomet, who from time of conception to day of debut, made it a career goal to bring his twisted vision to the screen.

This is a Paris that tourists (not even the Americans who natter on inanely at the beginning of the film) don't normally see: making his rounds one day, an emaciated gendarme stumbles upon a little old lady feeding creamy pastries to a flock of obese pigeons. Seeing the tubby little birds flopping around on their stubby little legs, and subsequently taking inventory of his own, barren larder, the policeman hits upon a cunning plan: garb himself as the world's largest pigeon, show up at the woman's doorstep, and let his victim's altruistic instincts take care of the rest. The plan works too well: in no time, the gendarme is both well filled-up and significantly filled-out, reveling in his deception even as he remains blissfully unaware that there may be reasons beyond mere kindheartedness why a sweet, little old lady might want to fatten herself up a flock of nice, juicy pigeons.

"I wasn't really interested in animation when I was younger," explained Chomet,

by **HAROLD
DAVID**



The Old Lady and the Pigeons

The long, twisted history of the short, twisted Oscar nominee.

who, prior to **OLD LADY**, had worked as a comics artist before becoming a director and animator for a number of production houses in England. "My culture was comic books, and you don't have much chance to see animated movies unless you go to the festivals. Then I started to go to the festivals and I was really amazed by some people. Paul Driessen is very important

to me, and Nick Park, too — when I saw **CREATURE COMFORTS**, it was a revelation. And I was really, really, really interested in John Lasseter's work with computer animation. Also, I've got a lot of admiration for some of the old Walt Disney movies. I feel very close to **101 DALMATIANS**, because they're using a very graphic [style] — you've got re-

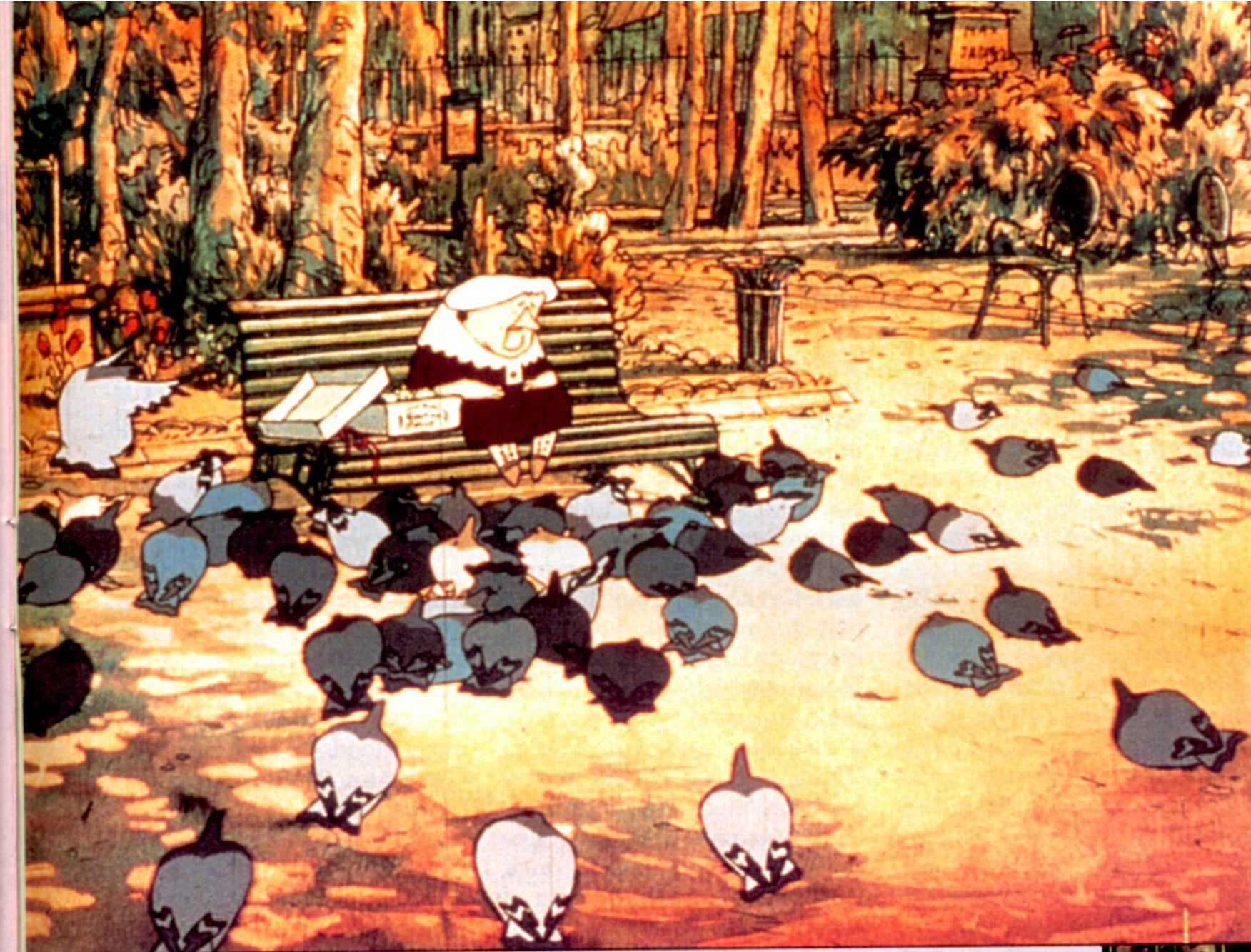
alistic characters that are not realistic characters."

It was, in fact, the stylized behavior of real pigeons that initially fired Chomet's graphic-artist instincts: "I was in this park when it was lunchtime. I was just discovering animation, and I was interested in the way the pigeons reacted to me. When you see them, they're very funny, because the only thing they've got in their heads is: *eat*. It came to me that what comes with pigeons is old ladies and what comes with old ladies is feeding pigeons. So the story is about this old woman feeding pigeons, while the gendarme, at the same time, can only think about eating, too. So we've got something about starving pigeons and starving gendarmes."

A picaresque storyline and potent drawing skills, though, are not always enough to win backers, as Chomet was soon to find out: "The technique of **THE OLD LADY** is very expensive — it takes a lot of people to work on it at different levels: the sound, the animation, the backgrounds. It took ten years [to produce] — this technique is much more North American; it's very difficult to get people in Europe interested in it.

"My first problem, when I had the idea, was to find a producer, because in Europe, unless you have a producer, you can't actually get money for a film — most of the money comes from the government or art institutes. It took me two years to find a producer in France who specialized in animation; that's very rare in France, because animation is not part of the culture.

"We couldn't get all the money for the film, so we said, 'The only chance we've got to sell the idea is to start working on it.' So we did four minutes, and then we didn't have any [go-ahead to continue with the project]. I moved to Canada, and while I was in Canada, Colin Rose, the producer at BBC — he became the [executive] producer of part II — saw the first four minutes and said, 'You should finish this film.' Because the BBC was involved in the project, we were able to raise money in Europe and then in Canada. So then we were



ten years on the same idea; this film has changed my life because I've moved to many places just to carry on making it. I just believed in it, and

SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GORGE: A flock of plump pigeons (left) leads a starving gendarme to create a "cunning" disguise (below) in Sylvain Chomet's dark-humored **THE OLD LADY AND THE PIGEONS**. Urban ecology at its most primal. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Director Chomet.

that's all.

"I didn't know I'd have the success I have with it now. Even at the end, when we finished the film, it wasn't suc-

able to finish the film; it took about one year to finish it."

Having initially created the film's first four minutes (up through the sequence in which the gendarme spies the old lady feeding the pigeons in the park) in France, Chomet now had to build a production team in Quebec to complete the project. In the end, up to 40 artists worked on the film, with the full staff finally topping out at about 50 members. Having had only one assistant with him on the first four minutes, Chomet found working with his full, Quebec complement a distinct pleasure: "It was a great experience, because there was not a lot of money on the film, and it was really demanding for the people to create something nice. The beginning was very difficult, because it was hard for these people to get in the mood of the movie. But they were really willing to work on the film, and they knew it was going to be a good film. That was really great.

"Humanly, it was an amazing experience. I couldn't have done the movie in France, because in France people are too... um, how do you say?... *individualist* — they take everything personally if you notice something in their work; they don't

realize that it's the *film* that's important. I got that kind of communication in Quebec — I could say, 'Okay, I don't want this,' and they didn't get offended with that. It was great for that — they were a great workteam."

What Chomet's team eventually delivered was a film that provides a wicked glimpse into myriad aspects of human hunger while gleefully toying with an audience's sympathies, nowhere more so than in the brutish way the gendarme takes advantage of the old woman. "There was one shot that was really, really important," said Chomet, "because it's like the middle-point of the film. It's when he's in her apartment, and he's throwing the teacups on the ground. There was a shot where my aim was to make her look pitiful. She's looking at him and she's got a cup of tea in her hand, which she's just putting on the table. Very sad. You would say, 'Oh my God, she's so cute, she's so nice, and he's such a bastard.' It's a very short shot and I think it's my favorite, for the animation, I mean. It's not a lot of animation, but that was something to make you think she was going to be

the victim.

"My main problem was not to sell the point before the end. You don't see it when it's getting sad; you don't begin thinking, '*Oh, something's going to happen and she might not be cute.*' It was very important for me to avoid that."

It may have taken a decade for **THE OLD LADY AND THE PIGEONS** to hit the screens, but in the end, Chomet found himself well rewarded for his patience. Not only has the film netted its creator a slew of awards, it also may serve as a springboard to a feature production that would work the original short into a trilogy of tales about the adventures of three identical sisters. Speaking from his Hollywood hotel room prior to the Academy Awards, Chomet was able to reflect on the wild ride his inspired black comedy has taken him on: "I just believed in it all the time, all the way through. It would have been very difficult for me to spend



cessful in festivals. For one year there was nothing happening, the film wasn't shown in festivals, and there were not a lot of people around me to say it was a good film. There were like two or three people, and at some point you start to say, 'Oh my God, it's not good.' Well... you don't think it's not good, you just think it's not going to be what you thought.

"Suddenly, we won the grand prize at the Annecy Film Festival, and it went completely crazy around the world. Now I'm here. Very bizarre. Now I walk into other films and I think, *My film, for me, is finished.* I don't really control what's going on, now. It's great, it's really amazing, because it's helping me to raise money for other films." **AFQ**

TO THE EXTREME

YOU'RE NEVER TOO DEAD OR TOO RED: RIPPIN' UP THE FUTURE WITH VIOLENCE JACK

TODD
FRENCH

Extrremely violent and brutal even for a genre awash in the most unfettered and dionysian of splatterspunk cel-dreams, Manga Video's release of the Soeishinsha/Japanese Home Video's three-part VIOLENCE JACK OVA saga remains strong fare. The creation of highly prolific and versatile manga great Go Nagai (DEVILMAN, CUTEY HONEY, MANZINGER Z), VIOLENCE JACK earns kudos for its totally committed, relentlessly savage vision of a post-apocalyptic dystopia.

Released in descending order, the series deserves credit for its joyless take on carnage. Looking like an army-surplus version of Wolverine, Jack's a taciturn hulk named for the big jack-knife he carries on his blood-soaked travels through a future, meteor-ravaged Japan. The mere sight of him "inspires fear and murderous intent in others" — but the innocent who "see the intelligence in his eyes" live to face another day.

EVIL TOWN (actually the second OVA in the series), deserves special scrutiny — it's one of the grimmest, most dispiriting meditations on human bestiality produced in the medium. Trapped in the bowels of a buried mall, various factions vie for power while digging their way to freedom: A-Section, composed of a bunch of button-down suit-types; B-Section, a band of psycho bikers led by disfigured chopper-lord Mad Saulus and his transsexual adjutant Kid Blue; and C-Section, an elusive group of women. When Jack is dug out of the rubble by the A-group, he initially becomes their enforcer, but switches allegiance to the girls when he finds out that the establishment figures are a bunch of

hypocritical rapist-scum.

Staging its action in narrow, vermin-infested stone corridors, EVIL TOWN presents a very credible version of Hell-on-earth. By the time its roster of rapes, dismemberments and outrages whizz by, most anime buffs will well have had their fill. Director Wada certainly deserves points in presenting splattery gore in the most downbeat light: when Jack goes to town on Saulus' crew after their assault on the women, the girls don't cheer, but cringe and shriek as their savior carves their oppressors into giblets. The cli-

ries—lost yet?) is more conventional and, along with SLUMKING, lacking the cumulative in-your-face shelacking of EVIL TOWN, it's still fairly high on the ultra-violence scale. Again helmed by Wada, the plot has an (unusually) chatty Jack helping out yet another source of burgeoning civilization — Hope Town — which has been targeted for pogrom by a sadistic gang of ROAD WARRIOR bikers led by the bandage-faced Dante and his clown-visaged second, Gokumon. This time around, Jack is given allies in the form of a redoubtable kid, Saburo,

and the woman warrior gets a prolonged, nasty torture-slashing by a knife-happy henchman. Meanwhile, Jack loses a little of his menacing-silent-brood aura by talking way too much.

SLUMKING (the first film released in the series) has Jack foiling the schemes of the titular character, a samurai-suited Lord Humongous-type trying to carve out a blood-stained empire in the wake of the Kanto Hell Quake. One of the annoyances of this episode is that the Slumking, with his GIANT MAJIN-like armored face-plate and sword, may be a bitchin' baddie, but aside from an anti-climactic prologue fight, he and Jack don't tangle for the rest of the OVA! Instead, Jack battles the villain's right-hand man, Harlem Bomber (the OVA's original title), and saves innocent young girl Mari from a fate as one of the Slumking's sex-slaves. What is most interesting about this first OVA is the more ambiguous presentation of Jack: though director Nonaoka includes lots of heroic-mythic imagery for the character, Jack is more Angel of Death than Monster With No Name: his very presence in Trench Town seals its fate (even though he saves Mari). In comparison to this Jack, the one in HELL'S WIND, is a virtual teddy-bear.

A note: though the Manga Video edition of EVIL TOWN denotes "uncut," the OVA has been drastically edited for stateside release. Among the cuts: some protracted (digitally masked) rape sequences; the gruesome knifing of the Section-A kids at the hands of the Saulus gang's sole female member (this is truly hard to stomach); and lots of gore in Jack's climactic trashing of the Saulus gang. **AFQ**



YOU WANT KETCHUP WITH THAT? Go Nagai's VIOLENCE JACK takes misogyny, misanthropy, and enough blood to float the Exxon Valdez, and wraps it all up in one glorious, muscle-bound package

mactic duel between Jack and a demonically-transformed Saulus is technically arresting: Wada animates Jack and Saulus as rough-sketched blood-red outlines against the back-drop of more conventional animation. One of the other niceties of the series is that at the end, Jack doesn't head off into the sunset with any of the babes — he can only go on to more carnage.

Although HELL'S WIND (actually the third in the se-

and a tough female biker/warrior who has been vengefully trailing the gang after the bikers chainsawed her lover and raped and left her for dead. Good enough on a graphic blood-and-guts level, the installment does make the mistake of sidelining Jack for much of the action; it isn't until the finale that he joins the action. Misogynistic cruelty still abounds: lovely young schoolteacher Miss Keiko is crucified against a jet tur-

TUNES FROM THE VAULT: DISNEY'S RE-RELEASED MELODY TIME

DAN
SCAPPEROTTI

After the release of *BAMBI* in 1942, Walt Disney wouldn't release another fully coherent animated feature until *CINDERELLA* in 1950. In the intervening years the studio produced several segmented features which utilized live action footage to introduce or supplement the animated segments. *MELODY TIME* was the last of these musical anthologies to be produced.

Disney hired some of the most popular singing talent in the country at the time. The Andrews Sisters, Fred Waring and his Pennsylvanians, Freddy Martin and his Orchestra, Dennis Day, and Roy Rogers and the Sons of the Pioneers joined to give the film a wide, vibrant tone that touched on all aspects of the music industry in 1948.

MELODY TIME is actually seven cartoons loosely linked by the narration of Buddy Clark, who introduces each segment. The film took some artistic chances, with a more stylistic approach to several of its stories rather than the stunningly realistic method used in Disney's earlier animated classics. While "Once Upon a Winter Time" owes more to Currier and Ives than to Frank Thomas or Ollie Johnston, the Green Hornet would hardly recognize his theme song, "Flight of the Bumble Bee," as interpreted by Freddy Martin and his Orchestra in "Bumble Boogie." This jazz version follows the misadventures of a lone bumblebee desperately trying to avoid disaster in a bizarre world of musical notes gone mad.

The underdog saves the day in the Disney version of Hardie Gramatky's "Little Toot," musically narrated by the most popular female group of the forties, the Andrews Sisters. A

bumbling young tugboat of the title disgraces his father, but wins respect by rescuing a storm-tossed ship. Little Toot encounters the horrors of the seas as seen through the eyes of a child, much as Snow White envisioned dangers in the forest while fleeing from the huntsman. The raging storm is wonderfully animated with plunging waves amid flashing lightning.

Joyce Kilmer's famous poem is set to music by Fred Waring and His Pennsylvanians in "Trees." It may be enough summation of this sequence to point out that, as the camera pulls back for the finale and the chorus sings "Only God can make a tree," a hilltop tree begins to take on the aspects of a crucifix.

Donald Duck is reunited with his cohort from *THE THREE CABALLEROS*, Jose Carioca, in "Blame It on the Samba." The pair stumble upon the Café de Samba, where their waiter is the wacky, irresponsible, and dangerous Aracuan bird whom Donald first encoun-

tered in *THE THREE CABALLEROS* and again in the 1947 cartoon short, *CLOWN OF THE JUNGLE*. The trio plumbs the depths of a wine glass, where they meet live action organist Ethel Smith. Ub Iwerks' special animation processes provide some stunning visuals to the segment's swirling wine glass animation.

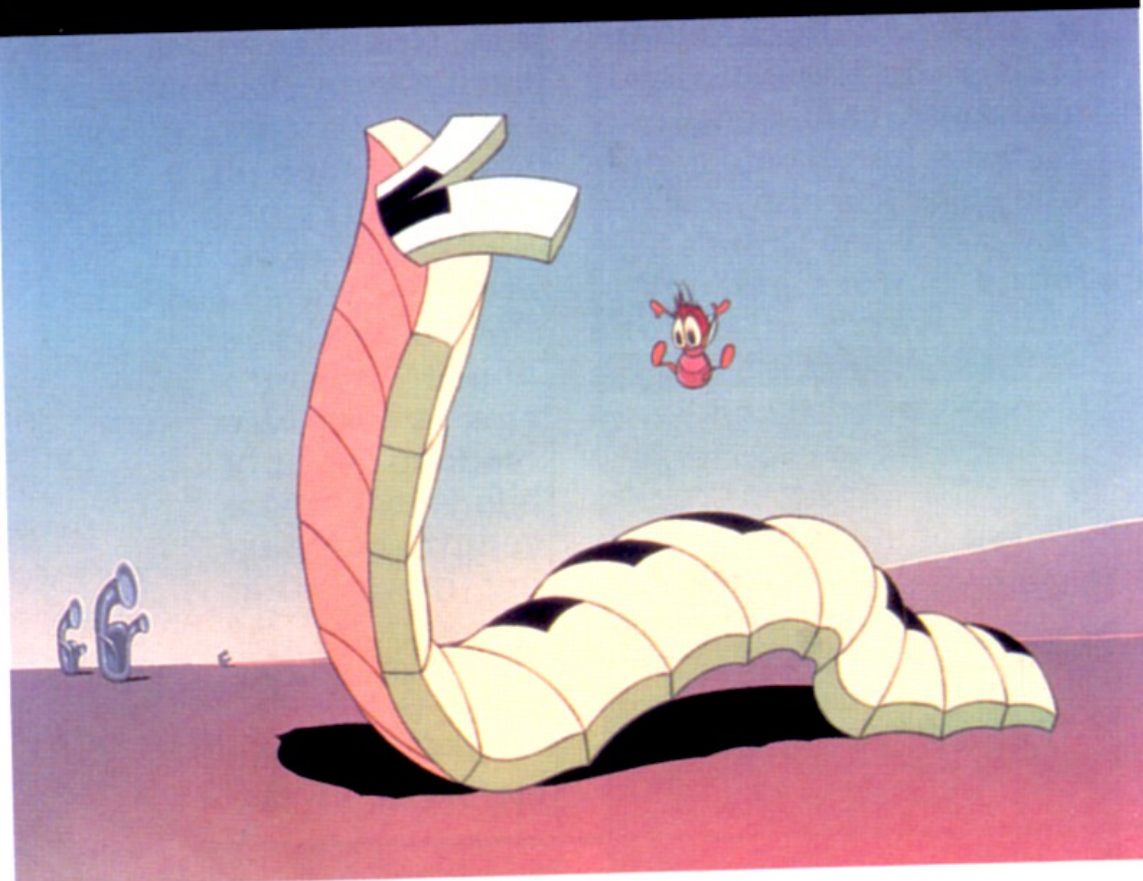
The film features two tales of American folk heroes. The first is the story of John Chapman, better known in song and story as Johnny Appleseed. The versatile Irish crooner from radio's Jack Benny program, Dennis Day, gives voice to not only Johnny, but to the Old Settler and Johnny's Angel as well. The last segment, "Pecos Bill," is the longest at 26 minutes, and takes up a third of the 75 minute feature. The live action cast includes Roy Rogers and Trigger, the best of the western harmonizing groups, the Sons of the Pioneers, and youngsters Luana Patten and Bobby Driscoll, both of whom had starred in Disney's

SONG OF THE SOUTH.

Rogers tells the youngsters the story of Pecos Bill, "The roughest, toughest critter west of the Alamo." Tumbling out of a covered wagon as an infant, Bill was raised by the coyotes and grew to be the toughest hombre on the desert along with his horse Widow Maker. "Pecos Bill" works best as a stand-alone project, since when it closes *MELODY TIME* also comes to a seemingly abrupt end. The film both benefits and is hampered by the individual artistic styles it incorporates, from the stunning traditional cartoon animation of "Pecos Bill" to the stylistic rendering of "Trees" and "Johnny Appleseed," which predated the limited detail that most animation studios adopted in later years. The artistry is reflected in the musical styles from the western harmony of Bob Nolan and the Sons of the Pioneers to the musical interlude of "Trees," which seems somehow forced and is the low-point in an otherwise cheery film.

While *MELODY TIME* didn't follow the re-release schedule of the studio's classic films, its segments did see further life on the big screen. As Disney began to focus more time on television and live action features and shorts, he began to supplement his cartoon release schedule by making the various segments from his anthology films, *MELODY TIME* and *MAKE MINE MUSIC* available as cartoons. All but two of the segments were reissued under their original titles. In 1955, the studio combined "Trees" and "Bumble Boogie" and released them as the cartoon, "Contrast in Rhythm." AFQ

BUGGIN' OUT: Disney artists flirt with the surreal in "Bumble Boogie," one of the more adventurous sequences from *MELODY TIME*.



This September, we finally got to reap the benefits of Disney's arrangement with Tokuma Shoten, as the Mouse House released Miyazaki's 1989 film **KIKI'S DELIVERY SERVICE**. Kiki is a thirteen-year-old girl who dreams of following in her mother's footsteps and becoming a witch. As part of her training, she must leave home for a year and settle in a town of her choice, using her powers to earn a living. Like many adolescent girls, however, Kiki has been neglecting her studies in favor of music, boys, and daydreaming. Her only skill is flying on a broom. And so, having found a suitable town by the ocean, Kiki establishes a flying delivery service.

Though Western journalists like to refer to Miyazaki as the "Japanese Walt Disney," his visual style and storytelling methods are actually quite different. There are no musical numbers. The animation has a softer look, tending toward pastels rather than primary colors. The storyline meanders from one episode to the next, making only the most token effort to tie them all into a linear plot. And yet the film never lags. Kiki is a charming heroine, and the characters she encounters on her delivery runs are a colorful bunch. It would be no chore to spend many hours immersed in their lives, let alone the 103 minutes that the film actually runs.

The film is lovely to look at. From the mother's flower

garden, to the green countryside flashing past a moving train, to the streets of Kiki's new home town, each setting is drawn in gorgeous detail. There is an amazing scene near the beginning when Kiki enters the town for the first time. As she soars over the harbor, then the rooftops, the entire scene is bathed in hazy morning sunshine. You can almost smell the breeze off the ocean.

As one would expect from a Disney production, the voice acting is first rate. Kirsten Dunst captures both Kiki's adolescent insecurity and her strength. Matthew Lawrence hits just the right note of cheerful energy as Tombo, the local boy with a fascination for flying.



Janeane Garofalo brings humor and quirkiness to Ursula, the painter who helps Kiki through a case of magical artist's block. But the best performance belongs to Phil Hartman, who is wonderfully snide, yet affectionate, as Jiji, Kiki's feline familiar.

The film is presented uncut, the translation faithful to the original. Miyazaki's fans will have nothing to complain about, viewers unfamiliar with this brilliant animator have a delightful surprise in store. **AFQ**

Marina Frants

I MARRIED A STRANGE PERSON

Directed by Bill Plympton; Lion's Gate; 75 mins. Voices: Charis Michelsen; Tom Larson; Richard Spore.

While the premise of Plympton's **I MARRIED A STRANGE PERSON** may seem completely absurd at first — a satellite dish sends a strange signal into the brain of a newly married man, forming a tumor that empowers him to turn his every thought into reality — the film actually plays as a humorous and perceptive allegory for the fears and concerns faced by married couples in a media obsessed world. Sadly, the line between Plympton's exaggerated reality and Jerry Springer's television reality is not that wide.

While the Disney company has made an art form and a multi-billion dollar business out of refining one specific, populist formula into animated features over and over again, Plympton is

willing to let smaller observations take center stage (picking dirt from under your fingernails, for example). Magnified, these observations take on Lynchian proportions, creating a reality of their own.

The plot of **I MARRIED A STRANGE PERSON** traces the lives of newly married Grant and Kerry Boyer, a handsome couple who enjoy a healthy sex life. However, when Grant's newfound powers get out of hand, Kerry questions whether she really knew the man she married and leaves him. Along the way we're treated to Grant's thoughts coming to life, often with violent or sexual leanings. When his powers are discovered, he becomes a media star, falling prey to the maniacal head of the SmileCorp media company

and his neo-Nazi soldiers, all of whom want the power to dominate the world.

Through his sketchbook drawing style, Plympton has an uncanny ability to infuse his characters with not only humor but sincere humanity. However, his exaggerated approach, much like David Lynch's work, brings viewers to the edge of visual and auditory overload. While making love to his wife, Grant fantasizes about having sex with a host of different women, and even three women at a time. When Kerry begs him to concentrate on her, her breasts grow so large they flow out of the house and onto the lawn. The scene is not only hilarious, but also genuinely arousing (in ways that live action films are not able, or allowed, to be).

In the end, the strength of the

couple's marriage vows overcomes all this weirdness and Kerry returns to her husband, joining him to fight for their future. The film includes a selection of musical numbers which are as toe-tapping in their melodies as they are perceptively funny in their lyrics.

I MARRIED A STRANGE PERSON provides a refreshing break from the animated offerings that too often land in theaters these days. Well worth watching, although, with its endless streams of violence and sex, definitely without the kids. **AFQ**

Anthony Montesano



If you're an anime purist, you're going to hate this English dubbed Manga video on principal alone (bad dubbing as usual). If you're into anime for the "art," then you will hate this video because of all the poorly done early 1990s stuff — harshly inked still frames that they pan-and-scan (this was definitely the wrong "artistic" choice) mixed with light, ethereal, good stuff. But, if you're an anime junky who likes hot sex and violence with a lot of spewing blood and mayhem, then you've got it made.

SWORD FOR TRUTH, Takeshi Narumi's showcase of the lone-swordsman-for-hire genre, is a fast paced, straightforward, mystical, mythical

SWORD FOR TRUTH Manga Video; 60 mins. Director: Takeshi Narumi. Dubbed version reviewed.



period piece. Death, mayhem, sex, mystics, ninjas, a beautiful princess, demons, a lucious tattooed thief with some strange bed habits, and death (or, did I mention that already?) fill the 60 minutes to the brim. There is an especially juicy scene for the male audience (or the gender bender) with two ladies having drugged sex. Ya' know, the princess never did what she promised in her opium-sexed haze — go figure. Also, the scene of the lone swordsman crossing paths with the assassin was a synergistic, mystically superb moment in the video.

SWORD FOR TRUTH is a likeable video with a fun story and an almost ignorable, uneven quality to the art. I recommend a look-see with or without your girlfriend in attendance. In either case, a bottle of wine would be appropriate. Red, of course.

Desire Gonzalés



THE SPIRIT OF MICKEY MOUSE

Disney; 83 mins. Directors (all uncredited!): Sharpsteen; Geronimi; Jackson; Hand; Nichols

THE SPIRIT OF MICKEY MOUSE is a terrific, almost definitive collection of some of the finest color Mickey Mouse cartoons of the '30s and early '40s (Mickey's prime). Though it is claimed that none of these eleven cartoons have appeared on video, in fact, three of them ("Steamboat Willy," "Mickey's Trailer," and "Mickey and the Seal") have, albeit two of them are only available on pricey Japanese bilingual laserdisc collections.

The original opening and end titles of the original shorts have been spliced out (though thankfully, the shorts are otherwise uncut), and the material is interspersed with **MICKEY MOUSE CLUB**-type prefatory material as well as an added opening theme song accompanied by clips of other Mickey cartoons. At last we have the video debut of such Mouse masterpieces as Wilfred Jackson's "The Band Concert" and David Hand's Alice-in-Wonderland-meets-Fred Astaire inspired "Thru the Mirror." What has been stunted on is Mickey's collaborations with both Donald Duck and Goofy. The only representative is Ben Sharpsteen's "Mickey's Trailer" (1938), which means such classics as "Alpine Climbers" and "Clock Cleaners" have to await a different collection.

One genuine rarity is "Mickey's Surprise Party (1939)," which was not theatrically released but was especially created for Nabisco (all advertising references have been deleted). These fine cartoons do indeed capture the spirit of Mickey.

Dennis Fischer

World War II devastated Japanese-occupied Korea. At war's close, scores of Japanese families were forced to flee from predominantly Russian-held Northern Korea over the 38th parallel to the South. Once in the supposedly more liberated, U.S-supervised territory, the expatriates had hopes of catching a boat to their native land — a land which many of them had never even seen.

RAIL OF THE STAR, which is based on factual accounts, tells the tale of 8-year-old Chiko Kobayashi. Painted in washed-out pinks and browns, the whole film has the look of an old, faded photograph. But so intense are young Chiko's experiences that there is a temptation to rip the video out of the player each time this precocious and stalwart little girl goes through one of her many, many traumas.

Eventually, Chiko's family throws in with a crowd of frightened, but determined fellow fugitives, and attempts to escape to the South by train. They are roused from their berths by Russian troops and ordered to return to the North on foot. Defying the order, the refugees look to the sky and follow a footpath lit by the brightest star in the heavens. The "Rail of the Star" eventually leads them to Southern Korea and to freedom.

This is a story of triumph amidst chaos, told without the visual and auditory clichés that so many so-called "true accounts" suffer from. **RAIL OF THE STAR** is not an easy film to watch. It is not an easy film to stop watching, either.

Mitch Persons



RAIL OF THE STAR A.D.V. Video; 80 mins. Director: Toshio Hirata. Dubbed version reviewed.

O hhhh, my my. You gotta work *awfully* hard to make **SOUTH PARK** look like Frank Capra, and director Masami seems to be just the man for the job. Lewd, crude, and rather funny, **THE PING PONG CLUB** tells the tale of six horny high-schoolers whose shared passion for the paddle is matched only by their desperation to get laid. That their strategies at the table make them the pariahs of their school (one player disorients his opponents by giving them a glimpse of his dick as he returns volley) only means that we'll be seeing episode after episode where the balls on the table are white, and those in the pants are a striking shade of blue.

Masami has found a fitting visual idiom to match this most extreme of comedies, relying on frames filled with grotesque caricatures and dramatic poses to let you know that this ain't exactly **TOTORO OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD**. The anything-for-a-retch mindset can at times leave the non-native

THE PING PONG CLUB Software

Sculptors; 120 mins.

Director: Hata Masami.

Subtitled version reviewed.



viewer a little flummoxed: the cultural references can be quite obscure, and the team features an American exchange student whose most prominent feature is his noxious body odor. I have no idea how I'm supposed to feel about that.

Still, you've got to give the producers credit for faithfulness to their subject. When one team member is courted by a cute young girl, he discovers that her crush developed when she saw the boy shit his pants. Ah, young love — 'twas ever thus.

AFQ

Dan Persons

THE FLAME OF REKKA

New from Japan, **FLAME OF REKKA** follows a tournament between a team of young fighters and the evil monstrosities loyal to the villain Kurie. Already rich and powerful, the only thing Kurie wants is eternal life. To get it, he needs Yangin, a beautiful young woman with a gift of healing. Eager to protect the maiden, the flame-wielding Rekka and his friends vow to stop Kurie. Certain his henchmen will be victorious, Kurie arranges a tournament, pitting Rekka and his friends against Kurie's minions in grudge matches that mix ancient blood-oaths with satirical, WWF-style hype. If Rekka wins, Yangin goes free. If the bad-guys win, Kurie gets to keep the girl.

The episode 'Fearsome Battle with an Invisible Enemy' lacks the dramatic fireball fights of earlier episodes. What



it loses in magic, however; it makes up in sheer quantities of blood. The youngest member of Rekka's team is called upon to fight a beautiful young man who knows the secret of invisibility. The young man is so vain that he arrives wrapped up like a mummy, lest something mar his fair features. He taunts our hero, revealing that he has specialized in hunting down and killing members of the ninja clan to which the boy once belonged. However, when our hero manages to wound his opponent's face, the killer loses control and beats our hero so badly that the blood splatters over the cloak, giving away his position. Superb fight animation, but not for the weak of stomach.

L. Jagi Lamplighter

THE POKEMON APOLOGY

Hey kids! About those seizures..." You don't reduce a sizable portion of your audience to incoherent masses and not say something about it (well, not unless you're Jerry Springer). So when **POCKET MONSTERS** — the kid's cartoon show that was pulled in Japan when special effects triggered epileptic-type fits in some viewers — returned from limbo on April 16th of this year, it did so with a curious prelude.

Surrounded by hundreds of plush **POCKET MONSTER** toys, a cheerful spokeswoman apologized to the children for the mishap. She explained that critics had seized upon this incident as proof of the dangers of cartoons. However, a panel of broadcasters, government specialists, and doctors (a conjunction helpfully illustrated with a flash-card) determined that the real culprit was a special effect that represented a lightning bolt with a series of diagonal lines and spirals in front of a rapidly alternating red and blue background (more flash-cards, *slowly* alternated to demonstrate the effect). The resulting strobe caused the seizures.

The spokeswoman assured the children that **POCKET MONSTERS** would be careful about its effects in the future, but stressed that viewers could do their part by watching in a lighted room and at a proper distance from the television (one last flash-card). She ended by showing a wall bearing hundreds of letters from children begging that **POKEMON** not be taken off the air. As the stuffed animals cheered the woman on in their cartoon voices, she thanked the viewers for their support.

Just for its completeness — touching even upon adult controversies — the **POKEMON APOLOGY** was a remarkable event. If there was the slightest whiff of commercial opportunism to the whole presentation, one still has to give the broadcasters credit for according their audience enough intelligence to comprehend the details of this complex affair.

L. Jagi Lamplighter and Dan Persons

COWBOY BEBOP

Not all space adventure tv series are the same. Case in point: **COWBOY BEBOP**, a surprising action show featuring a team of bounty hunters who travel the universe in a ship called the Bebop, righting wrongs and hunting down bad guys, all for a tidy profit.

The stories are good — in the episode we checked out, directed by Watanabe Shinichirou, you get a dynamite bar fight, a spectacular space-chase, and a suspenseful, pressure-suit-less deep-space rescue for a capper. Who could ask for more? The main cast — Spike Spiegel, Faye Valentine, Jet Black, Ed and Ein (the dog) — are more than stock anime characters. They have personality and life that make them work as living, breathing individuals. By sheer force of her presence, Faye Valentine (voiced by Megumi Hayashibara) will become one of your all-time favorite anime characters.

The overall visual design is impressive as well, with unique mecha designs and settings. **COWBOY BEBOP** effectively mixes 3D computer graphics with cel animation in such a way that the two mediums do not clash, the CG elements functioning unobtrusively as the background settings they were intended to be. As far as the music



goes, Yoko Kanno again delivers an amazing musical score for an anime series — definitely a soundtrack CD worth looking for. All in all, this series is a thoroughly enjoyable ride that will hopefully get to these shores soon. See you again, space cowboy...

Even Nelson

OUT OF JAPAN

DEMON TEACHER NUBE

TV Asahi; 30 mins. Directors: Akihiko Yamaguchi; Hiroyuki Tsunodo. Voices: Kentaro Okiami, Hiroko Fujita, Rumi Kasahara.

The GHOST IN THE SHELL/NINJA SCROLL crowd (you know: hard stuff fans) should probably stay away, but if you dig the heart-throbbing voices of Rumi Kasahara and Mina Tominaga, you'll be in heaven. This half-hour series may have been intended for preschoolers, but it's downright addictive. Nube — a young, preschool teacher with a cursed, empowered hand — has to protect his young charges while facing down all the demons and ghosts of Japan. The morals are simple: friends are good to have; take good care of your parents; whatever. In comparison to POWER RANGERS, though, this stuff is downright Shakespearean. Of the batch we checked out (which included an episode about a demonically possessed school office and a two-parter resurrecting one of Nube's ancient adversaries), my favorite concerned young Saibaba striving for his own alien encounter. The contrast between his ethereal dream of First Contact and the brutal reality would be enough to give Scully and Mulder pause. Animation doesn't rise above the adequate. No pain, no gain — Nube said so, remember?

Tomoyuki Nakamura

NIGHTMARE CAMPUS VOLUME 1:

RESURRECTION OF THE DEMON LORD ESEDESS

Anime 18, 40 mins. Director: Koji Yoshikawa. Dubbed version reviewed. Voices: J. Robert Spencer, Frankie Rome, George Leaver.

When is plagiarism not plagiarism? When you're ripping yourself off! From a good number of the folk who gave us UROTSUKIDOJI —producer Yasuhito Yamaki, adult manga auteur Toshio Maeda (who wrote the original UROTSUKIDOJI),

as well as UROTSUKIDOJI score-meister Masamichi Amano, comes this witless, blatant, incomprehensible, and incredibly cheap-jack animation rip-job. All the genre elements (and series signatures) are here, some, frame-by-frame: horny teens; horny demons; a teenage boy possessed by a hierarchial demon lord; his nubile, soon-to-be-violated girlfriend; an enigmatic stranger with supernatural powers. You get the general gist. The animation is horrendous, and character design is crude. Though UROTSUKIDOJI is hardly the balls-to-the-wall oddity it once was, the lack of imagination behind that predecessor does not come close to rivalling NIGHTMARE CAMPUS at its most pointlessly sadistic and misogynistic.

Note: another indication of the cheapness of the enterprise is the way in which soundtrack artist Amano, who did a fine job on the UROTSUKIDOJI series, lazily accompanies much of the atrocities with lifts from Beethoven's 8th Symphony! Agggghhhh! Rating: Worthless.

Todd French

COMPUTER ANIMATION CELEBRATION

Sony; 50 mins.

Sony Video's COMPUTER ANIMATION CELEBRATION showcases the many computer studios that are trying, through their efforts with short subjects, to emerge as the LOONEY TUNES of the medium. The tape compiles 23 recent comput-

er animation short subjects. Like the classic animated shorts, these "high tech" variations are a mixed bag, some tame, some bizarre and some technical and aesthetic knockouts.

Still, there is enough in the COMPUTER ANIMATION CELEBRATION to like. Some standouts include Jonah Hall's OPEN MIKE NIGHT, vinettes which look at beatnik poetry at a roadside hotel; LAVA JR., Randy Bauer's canny send-up of Pixar's LUXO, JR.; and DUST CITY, a spectacular "all-robot" western from the animation team of Sebastian Droien, Olivier Dumont and Christophe Mutin.

Mike Lyons

LANDLOCK VOLUMES 1 AND 2

Manga Video; 45 mins. (Vol. 1); 55 mins (Vol. 2). Director: Yasuhiro Matsumura. Dubbed version reviewed.

Touted by Manga Video as another creation from the man who brought us GHOST IN THE SHELL, LANDLOCK promises much but delivers little. Luden, a young man with one red eye, is sought by Zaroas, the cruel master of the mysterious flying city of Longinus. Zaroas fears Luden because an ancient prophecy claims the Red-Eyed One will be able to call on the 'Strength of the Wind.' When Luden escapes his men, Zaroas sends his daughter, the super-assassin Agahali, to seek the young man. However, Agahali is not who she seems.

Here the plot begins to unravel, never to come back together again.

While Luden demonstrates his control over the winds in the opening sequence, he never uses it again — not even at the climax, where he stands by helplessly as a totally unexpected and unexplained phenomena defeats the villain. The situation is not helped by the unusually bad quality of the translation. We can only hope that a better translation would make more sense of the otherwise unintelligible plot.

L. Jagi Lamplighter

THE HEROIC LEGEND OF ARSLAN

U.S. Manga Corps; 60 mins. Director: Mamoru Hamatsu. Dubbed version reviewed.

This episodic piece is a good example of what is right and wrong with OVAs. On the one hand, the piece is strikingly well designed, as previous installments have been. Based on a novel by Yoshiki Tanaka, which in turn was inspired by Persian myths and history, this picks up where previous OVA chapters left off, only with several of the character names changed per the request of the Japanese producers. (Manga helpfully identifies each character by both old and new name.)

However, despite a long prelude designed to get newcomers up to speed, one doesn't really get to know the characters apart from what side each is on. Prince Arslan prepares to fight to free his father, King Andragoras of Pars, and lead his army against the Lusitanians. Meanwhile, the ruthless Silvermask seeks the sacred sword of Ruknabard in the tomb of Kai Hoslo, though in doing so he may unleash the loathsome Snake King, Zahak, who would return the world to darkness.

Biggest problem is that these two half hour episodes are simply the central part of a sprawling saga and do not come to a conclusion so much as simply end. Terrific for fans but endlessly frustrating for newcomers. Especially notable for the large amount of pretty-boy, androgynous male characters; however, the overdone accent of Lajendra, the main Hindu character, is almost unforgivable.

Dennis Fischer

GIVE THE KIDS A HAND: DEMON TEACHER NUBE comes to the rescue of his young charges, making for a half-hour of addictive kid-vid.



AMERICAN ANIME?

MICHAEL
REAVES

Does the future of animation in this country lie in the direction of a new American style of anime? Those who believe it does point to shows like **BATMAN: THE ANIMATED SERIES**, **GARGOYLES**, or **SPAWN** as examples. They cite the heavily stylistic design and artwork, the influences of *film noir* and the existential, at times almost nihilistic, storylines which are clearly aimed at older viewers. All of these things are hallmarks of classic Japanese anime, they say, reinvented for American sensibilities.

Bushwah, reply the *otaku*, the hardcore fans of Japanese animation. Though they'll admit certain similarities — if backed to the wall with a gun to the head — they nonetheless insist that anime is distinguished from animation, particularly American animation, by (among other things) its use of the sophisticated direction, cinematography, pacing, *et. al.*, usually associated with live-action films. Most of it is aimed at young adults and adults, not kids — who are still the traditional demographic for American animation. Yes, shows like **BATMAN**, **INVASION AMERICA**, and others are a definite step away from the standard toy-driven Saturday morning or weekday afternoon cartoons — but, the critics say, there still has been nothing produced in America that comes close to being anime.

Call it what you want, no one can deny there is a noticeable trend these days towards the dark side in American animation. And the amount of Japanese ani-

me released in this country, both subtitled and dubbed, is steadily increasing — a potpourri of giant transforming robots, scantily-clad girls with eyes as big and blue as Lake Superior, and punk motorcycle gangs scavenging in futuristic ruins. Of course, in terms of total bucks earned, anime of any type is still very much a specialty item. It has yet to warm the cockles of the American Heartland like Disney does so relentlessly. Most people still think of anima-

boomers who grew up watching the world being devoured by various and sundry giant insects during the '50s are now the designers of popular culture. And, like all artists, most of them have a desire to push the envelope, to take their chosen medium further than it has ever gone.

At the same time, the proliferation of the new cable, broadcast and satellite channels — the "Information Superhighway" — has caused the networks, who formerly

and **BEAST WARS** have proven to be very popular. Other shows, like **INVASION AMERICA**, effectively blend CG (computer generated) animation with traditional cel work.

But CG, as versatile as it is, still works better in action-adventure shows as opposed to comedy shows. That's because hand-painted cels come across as "warmer" than computer generated images. (Yes, I know there are exceptions, but we're talking about the big picture here.) As a result, many action-adventure shows have a new and intriguing look to them, while the comedy shows, however well done, tend to present as the same old stuff.

But won't this new and intriguing look quickly become old hat as everyone jumps on the CG bandwagon? Not as long as the technology keeps advancing. Eventually it will be possible to "desktop produce" animation on your PC that rivals the best the studios can do today — both in adventure and comedy.

Like it or not, *toon noir* is here to stay. Shows like **SPAWN** do more than push the envelope; they tear it to shreds, and, in the final analysis, may prove too much for a mainstream audience. Still, a corner has definitely been turned. We can't go back to the age of innocence, as much as some of us might want to. Scooby-Doo is now an attack-trained Rotweiler. Deal with it. **AFQ**

Emmy Award winner **Michael Reaves** has written for **BATMAN: THE ANIMATED SERIES** and **GARGOYLES** and was a producer and co-creator of **INVASION AMERICA**.



INVASION AMERICA shows all the earmarks of what fans have come to expect from anime, but is it the wave of the future, or a pause in a still-gestating artform?

tion as composed of funny animals and sight gags rather than dark and brooding superheroes. And many think that the "American anime" trend is only the outermost arc of the pendulum's swing, and that eventually, inevitably, it will settle back to a more mainstream position.

And that very well might be the case. But there are some variables here that have to be considered.

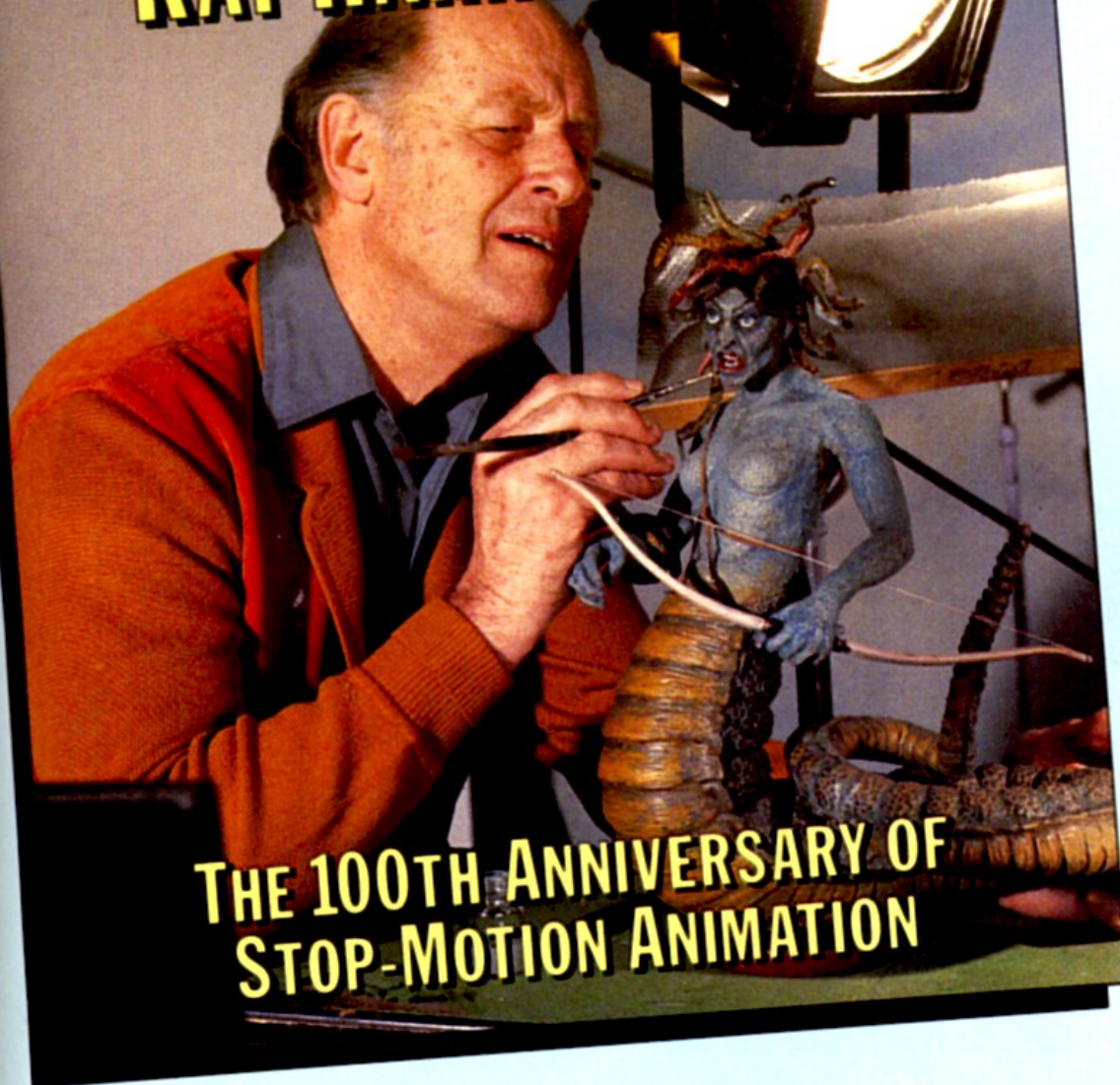
In all forms of media today, science fiction, fantasy, and horror are more popular than ever before. The baby

controlled the market, to take more and more chances as they watch their core audience steadily erode. They'll try any type of programming these days, even if it's good.

In addition to giving us many more venues, the new technological advances really open up a whole new world in the animation field. Computer generated and computer assisted animation have become very cost-effective even in the relatively low-budget world of TV animation. Shows like **REBOOT**

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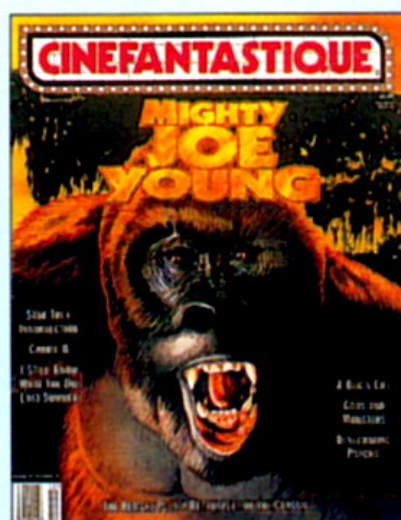
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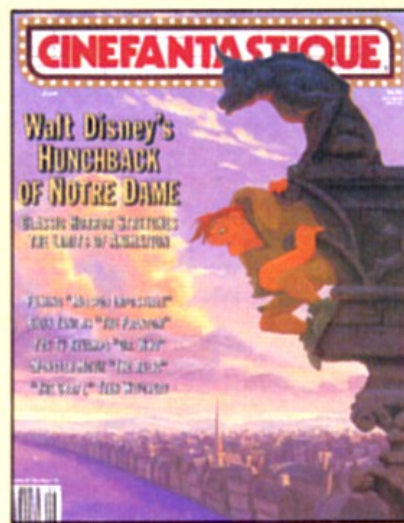
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